

Unpacking the Policy Process: A Case of (re)designing a Humanities Curriculum

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Abstract: This study was an attempt to understand the policy process behind the production and consumption of a policy paper governing reform in the Humanities curriculum of Hwa Chong Institution (High School Section). Employing Stephen Ball's policy cycle approach, this qualitative study examined the contexts of influence, production and practice of curriculum (re)design. Documentary data analysis, personal and focus group interviews and classroom observations formed the basis of data collection. Four teachers and 16 students were interviewed in total, with two classroom observations conducted. Analyses of data were conducted through the processes of coding, memoing, abstraction, comparison, and conclusion drawing.

The results indicated policy production and implementation as a contested and politicised activity, emphasising policy process as a discourse with mixed effects. The unpredictability in policy effects comes as a result of policy being a product of struggles and compromises that experience material constraints and possibilities. Positive effects included a shift towards student-centred pedagogy, empowerment of teachers and students, the contextualisation of classroom learning and a higher level of morale and motivation amongst teachers and students. Issues of concern included greater teacher-accountability in students' performance and higher workload and stress levels of teachers and students in the new curriculum. All of these have a great bearing on on-going curriculum review and refinement.

Keywords: policy, qualitative, discourse, politicised, compromises, effects

1. Overview

Since 1997, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore has put in place several key components to realise the state's vision of 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation' – a thrust to refine education in Singapore, with schools as crucibles in developing a nation of life-long learners. Manifold changes were introduced into the education system including a revision of the national school curriculum, the implementation of the use of Information Technology (IT) in teaching and learning, new school management systems - with the aim of injecting greater autonomy for schools, a new career structure and recognition package for teachers, as well as changes in the local university admission criteria.

Included in the plethora of schemes to overhaul the education system was the proposal to introduce an 'Integrated Programme' (IP) in select schools to provide more educational options for students in Singapore. Hwa Chong Institution (HCI) is one such school that has adopted the IP since 2004.

This purpose of this study was to analyse the policy processes that governed the revision of the Humanities curriculum (hereafter to be known as Integrated Humanities or IH) in HCI. The objectives for doing so are twofold: Firstly, it is to uncover the politics (macro and micro levels) behind this policy's formulation and implementation, in order to understand established or sustained relations of power and dominance supporting the rationality of this policy.

Secondly, it provides for the institution an opportunity to review the successes and/or failures of its reform in the Humanities curriculum vis-a-viz the intents and outcomes of the reform through the policy process, with a larger aim of curriculum refinement and improvement.

1.1 Background to the IP Model of Education in Singapore

1.1.1 A Changing World, An Evolving Educational System

In a press release in 2002, the Steering Committee set up to review Junior College/Upper Secondary education, chaired by the present Minister for Education, Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam noted that the revised school curriculum “should be sufficiently broad to prepare students for the new demands of the knowledge economy” (The Straits Times, 2002). This effectively laid out the blueprint to offer additional models of education¹ to Singaporeans, one of which is the setting up of IP schools.

The advent of globalisation has created a vast array of opportunities and in order to capitalise on them, Singapore needs to prepare her young adequately by nurturing “an adaptable people, with a knack for creating new opportunities and seizing others as they come” (The Straits Times, 2004). This closely mirrors Bacchus’ (1990) view that reforms in the nature of education is done so that people “can be better prepared to earn their livelihood in the changing socio-economic context of their societies” (Bacchus, 1990: 130), a view shared by Carr (1993: 6) in which he asserted that the “the curriculum of schools serves to integrate individuals and society by reproducing the forms of consciousness and structure of social relationships characteristics of contemporary social life.”

The ability to create value and stay relevant in the global arena rests upon Singaporean’s imaginations and their willingness to experiment and test out ideas and approaches. As a national symbol for embarking on the winds of change and the casting away of old mindsets, the introduction of IP, as a revamped model of education serves as a pertinent and timely initiative to enable Singapore to survive through a new and uncertain future. This is what Bacchus (1990: 131) referred to as “attempting to raise the ‘external efficiency’ or ‘effectiveness’ of schools.”

1.1.2 The IP System in Singapore

Under the previous system, a child will go through six years of compulsory primary education, terminating at Primary 6 with the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). This is a national placement examination that filters the child through to four streams at the secondary level: Special; Express; Normal (Academic); Normal (Technical) (Refer to Appendix 1 for an explanation of these streams).

Technically, all streams offer the opportunity to lead the child up to the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examinations (GCE ‘O’ levels)², a national terminal (secondary level) examination based on the British’s model. After the ‘O’ levels, students may opt for a tertiary education in one of five polytechnics or pursue a pre-university course

¹ Other models of education include the possibility of allowing privately-funded secondary schools to operate in Singapore, the establishment of ‘specialised’ schools with niche emphasis like the Sports School (which began operation in January 2004) and the National University of Singapore (NUS) Maths and Science School.

² Special and Express streams’ students take their ‘O’ level examinations at the end of 4 years. Normal (Academic) students have to sit and pass an intermediary Normal level (‘N’ level) at the end of their fourth year in secondary school, before they may be advanced to sit for the ‘O’ levels at the end of their fifth year. So far, no Normal (technical) students have managed to sit for the ‘O’ levels after their ‘N’ levels, since the stream was introduced in 1994.

in one of 15 Junior Colleges (JC), leading to the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examinations (GCE 'A' levels).

Thereafter, the able ones will enter university with their 'A' level results, either locally or overseas or seek employment. Of course students may decide to seek employment after their secondary education, after completing 10 years of compulsory education at the primary and secondary levels (Refer to Appendix 2 for a flow chart of the education system prior to the introduction of IP schools).

The IP was conceived to cater to the needs of the more academically able students, so that they may skip the 'O' levels and proceed straight to JCs to pursue a pre-university education, with the flexibility of participating schools to adopt different terminal qualifications to the 'A' levels (for example the International Baccalaureate). In essence, the IP offers students a seamless education process and experience from the lower secondary to pre-university levels.

1.2 The Context for IP in Case Study School

HCI was one of four institutions that pioneered the IP in 2004. In so doing, it had collaborated very closely with its sister institution, Hwa Chong Junior College (one of the top JCs in Singapore), both of which had since merged into one institution in 2005.

The institution is a premiere all-boys secondary school in Singapore, taking in the top 3% of each PSLE cohort every year. Starting from 2004, all its secondary one students will progress seamlessly from Year One (previously named secondary one) to Year Six (previously named pre-university year two or JC2), subject to satisfactory performance in each year. The boys will sit for a terminal examination at the end of Year Six, in which the traditional 'A' level examinations have been retained as the qualifying assessment for admission into local and overseas universities. At the point of writing this paper, there are five levels (Years One to Five) of IP students in the school. The current Year Five boys were the first batch of IP students to graduate from the High School section of the institution into the College section.

Under IP, the institution's high school curriculum was devised around four major academic groupings: English Language and the Humanities; Chinese Language, Values and Cultural studies; Mathematics and the Sciences; Creative Arts and Information Technology.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 General Research Questions

1. What were the processes at work in (re)designing the Humanities curriculum in HCI (High School section)? (*context of influence*)
2. Who were the parties involved in the policy process? (*context of policy text production*)
3. To what extent has the (re)designed curriculum attained its specified objectives? (*context of practice*)

2 Literature Review

2.1 Defining Policy

Definitions of ‘policy’ abound over time and have changed to reflect the multifarious dimensions and politics at work in the production and consumption of policies. Traditionally, policy has been defined as a text or document that implicitly or explicitly specifies “courses of purposeful action being followed or to be followed in dealing with a recognised problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals” (Harman, 1984: 13, quoted in Taylor et al., 1997: 24). It follows from this that traditional notions of ‘policy’ are that of it being usually an authority-led (state or otherwise) directive to remedy unfavourable conditions or practices, arguably for the betterment of parties involved.

This sits uncomfortably with Taylor, et al. (1997) and Vidovich (2002) who viewed such stance as too simplistic and functional a conception of ‘policy’. They problematised the sole focus on product in traditional notions of policy and strove to incorporate both product and process in the definition. As argued by Taylor et. al. (1997: 24) “in relation to policy, we need a definition which reflects the political nature of policy as a compromise which is *struggled over* at all stages by *competing interests*” (emphases my own). This ‘struggle’ in policy formulation, communication and implementation is also reflected in Ozga’s (2001) view that policy processes and practices tend to be a contested terrain:

“... I want to make it clear that my understanding of policy is that it is struggled over, not delivered, in tablets of stone, to a grateful or quiescent population...” (2000: 1)

To further refine our understanding of ‘policy’, both Taylor et. al. (1997) and Vidovich (2002) referred to Ball’s emphasis on policy as:

“Both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice.” (1994: 10, quoted in Taylor et. al., 1997: 25)

In doing so, the political character of both the production and consumption of policies can be foregrounded. Hence, the definition of ‘policy’ adopted in this study would include the processes prior to and during the formulation of policy texts (product), as well as the consumption of such texts, translated into deeds that are directed to achieve a specific set of objectives. Of equal emphasis would be the effects (intended or otherwise) arising from the implementation of such policy texts.

2.2 Types of Policies

Having conceptualised policy as a triumvirate intersection of ongoing process(es), product(s) and implementation, a part of the policy literature also focused on the classification of policies based on binary distinctions. According to Dudley and Vidovich (1995) and Taylor et al. (1997), there are generally three classes of policies identified – those that are concerned with allocation or distribution of resources (distributive or regulatory policies), those that pertain to the commitment to implementation by those responsible for policy formulation (symbolic or material policies) and those that deal with the method of doing things as laid down in policies (substantive or procedural policies) (For specific examples of each type of policy, see Taylor et al. 1997). It is important to note at this point that the typologies identified here are not always mutually exclusive, and their meanings may

vary somewhat in different contexts. However, they do provide us with a set of vocabulary to articulate with within the various realms of policy studies.

2.3 Global Trends and their impacts on Education Policy

A recent change in global context has brought about changes in education, particularly in the fields of educational instruction and management. Globalisation for instance has reconfigured the world's economic landscape, redefined international workplaces, while in the same breath opened up new markets in hitherto untapped countries like China and India. New employment opportunities have been created while old, redundant jobs have been eradicated swiftly.

Coupled with this economic revolution are the challenges that are confronting mankind – the threat of global terrorism and the emergence of new viruses like SARS and Bird Flu and the possible mutations these will likely bring. All these point towards a future fraught with uncertainty and un-paralled challenges. The ability to adapt swiftly to changes will matter greatly in the new world order. “Globalisation is magnifying the advantages of those who are able to adapt and to thrive on change, and the disadvantages of those who cling on to old ways” (The Straits Times, 2004).

In his article, Bottery (1999) argued that global issues and trends (in this case, with specific reference to globalisation) would strongly influence the policies of nation-states, and that “one of the clearest areas of policy impact is that to do with educational management” (1999: 300). After all, one of the core missions of education is to produce human resource capable of supporting the economic, political and social infrastructure of a nation. In line with Waters' (1995) three forms of globalisation, Bottery (1999) suggested that political, economic and cultural globalisation would have a considerable amount of impact on education policies, bringing about ‘new ways’ of doing things. However, he also qualified that such impacts will be mediated to various degrees by local governments.

One of the ‘new ways’ of doing things as put forth by Bottery (1999) was that educators in the developed world have been urged to consider “practices from other sectors of which those in the public education sector would do well to take note” (1999: 303) – what he termed as managerial globalisation. As a result, terms like ‘quality’, ‘competence’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘accountability’ began to infiltrate into educational management language, encouraging changes in school management not only to increase schools’ levels of efficiency but efficacy as well as accountability. Such changes in practices echo Green's (1999) sentiments that globalisation has led to “clear convergences at the level of policy discourse and general policy objectives” (1999: 59) across many countries, albeit only at a macro level.

In upper secondary education in Europe for example, there has been a concerted effort to bridge academic and vocational learning, skills and knowledge acquisition in response to “the fluidity of modern job roles, and to enhance the connection between education and work” (Green, 1999: 60). At the macro level of education policy formulation, there seemed to be an emphasis on what Brown and Lauder (1997) termed as the ‘post-Fordist’ model of national economic development, where a ‘magnet’ economy is created by the state capable of re-inventing its relevance for the global market place, “through measures such as a long term investment in human capital and national infrastructure and the sponsorship of promising industries and services” (Sharpe and Gopinathan, 2002: 153). This move towards an ability-driven education system globally was given a Singapore context through the work of Sharpe

and Gopinathan (2002), both of whom attempted to understand the direction of initiatives undertaken by the Singapore government in the reforms to her education system over the years.

Other early works in the literature that concerned themselves with educational policy-making in the context of change included Kogan's (1985) discussion on how values within the English higher education system originated and are adopted and taught as well as Dennison's (1985) survey of the changed economic and demographic circumstances of the 1980s and their bearings on the English national education policy formulations.

As Singapore attempts to re-make her education system in line with current global changes in economic and political orders, the wealth of research outlined above bears testimony to the significance of studying how such a re-making process is achieved and its consequences on her education community, vis-a viz policy analyses.

2.4 Policy Reforms and their impact on teachers

Yet another field of policy research focused on the effects of nation-wide or school-wide reforms (especially in curriculum) on teachers, often perceived to be at the receiving end of policy processes. For example, Mansell (2000) studied the impacts on the work and sense of professionalism of New Zealand school teachers, following a decade of nation-wide changes to school governance, administration, curriculum and assessment. Some positive outcomes observed by her study included a "greater detail in planning, the link between planning and assessment, the practice of continuing review of programmes and greater school wide structure to curriculum coverage" (2000: 24). On the other hand, the reforms brought about increased workload for teachers, caused some to suffer mental health issues and the erosion of certain levels of collegiality – the sharing of ideas and resources amongst teachers, as a result of increased competition.

Another study that looked at the impacts on teachers as a result of curriculum policy changes was that undertaken by Vidovich and O'Donoghue (2003), albeit in a different context and on a different scale. In addition to surveying the effects on teacher's workload and scope of professionalism following continuous school-wide curriculum changes and refinement, the study also examined global and local influences that govern change in a top secondary school in Singapore. This was a study that used a Singapore school as one of a few case studies in a variety of English speaking countries in the developed world to examine the "implications of curriculum reform" for non-government schools, "arising out of various forces shaping educational policy internationally" (Vidovich and O'Donoghue, 2003: 352).

2.5 Bringing it Together: Significance of Study

While the threads of education policy research are numerous and at times disparate, there are discernible unifying themes that may guide the policy researcher. Firstly, case studies were more often than not, principal methodological means of illuminating and supporting theories of policy-making. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, policy is often viewed as a process rather than a product, involving what Ozga (2001) describes as "negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making" (2001: 2).

The involvement of different interest groups in policy processes, each with its own agenda brings out the concept of power (usually associated with control and compliance) expressed in the form of ideologies as the main architecture of ideas, beliefs and principles.

In turn, the perpetuation of such ideas, beliefs and principles by a dominant social group within any community or society will help shape its members' 'commonsense' understanding of the social, cultural and political world around them. This contributes to what Dudley and Vidovich (1995) calls ideological hegemony, where "hegemonic ideologies are the basis for consensus in society and particularly the basis of consensus with respect to policy" (1995: 28). Thus, in policy domains, processes exist to legitimatise and rationalise dominant ideas, goals and beliefs through the enactment and practice of individual policies.

The common presentation of policy documents as uncontested fact belies the struggle over meaning and significance in the policy making process. Hence according to Dudley and Vidovich (1995: 31) "the language of policy documents constitutes ideological artefacts which is possible to 'read' as discursive texts." It is only through an analysis of the intent, process and real outcome of a policy that the ideological premises of the policy and the real interests it serves can be revealed.

The analysis of the policy document outlining the revision of the Humanities curriculum in Excel Institution represents one such endeavour. It will help shed light on the particular forms of rationality that helped shape its policy making process and the discourse(s) generated in its formulation and implementation. More importantly, it will potentially help to bridge any possible gaps between intents and outcomes of the policy, enabling an effective appraisal and revision of policy if necessary. This not only adds to the current corpus of work on education policy research, but is also a timely assessment of the mission, needs and practices related to Humanities education in Excel institution, within the newly implemented IP model of educational experience in Singapore.

2.6 Conceptual Framework for Policy Analysis

Stephen Ball's policy cycle approach towards analysing policy was adopted for this study. This model of analysis had been selected owing to its ability to "highlight the complex and contested nature of education policy as a process rather than an end product" (Vidovich, 2002: 6), as the focus is placed on micro-political processes involved in policy formulation and the agency of practitioners in interpreting, implementing and (re)constructing policies at a local level.

Three contexts of policy process will be identified: the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice. The context of influence examines the rationale and the struggles between and within interest groups over the construction of policy. This presents policy process as the active act of creating discourses that help to further the agenda of these interest groups. Most commonly, this will be concretised into policy texts (statements), where specifications or recommendations are put forth to achieve the requisite objectives. This is the point where key concepts, hidden agenda and values of the policy can be surfaced. The context of practice examines the reading and implementation of policy, as well as the effects (intended or unintended) after implementation.

3 A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach to research was adopted in this study and it helped determine the most suitable mode(s) of data collection and analysis. This was the most suitable approach to this study as it sought to create an overview of the policy context and 'reality' that led to the writing and execution of the IH programme in HCI (High School Section) – a context and 'reality' that may not be single, fixed and agreed upon, hence subject to open interpretations. In this manner, the policy's "logic, arrangements, explicit and implicit rules" (Punch, 2005:

141) may be exposed in order that larger social and political contextual factors that affected the ways in which individuals (teachers and students in the school) came to interpret and construct their realities (the ‘new’ way to doing Humanities) may be reviewed (Merriam, 2002).

3.1 Case Study as the Research Design

The fact that this study focused on understanding the policy process with respect to curriculum (in a specific area) reform in a specific school setting gave it a boundary (a bounded system) that typically characterises case studies (Punch, 2005). In this instance, the unit of study, which according to Merriam (2002) (see also Berg, 2004 and Punch, 2005) that typically characterises a case study and not the topic of investigation was the IH programme in the school, developed from a policy paper which became the main driver of change. The other area in which this study typified a case study was the multiple data collection methods as outlined by Punch (2005), described in section 3.2.

Furthermore, this study represented what Stake (1994) (quoted in Punch, 2005: 146) referred to as an “intrinsic case study” where generalisation is not the main objective. This is because this study might be unique in itself in some very important respects and thus worthy of study - HCI (High School Section) being the only Special Assistance Plan (SAP)³, all-boys, non governmental school in Singapore pioneering the IP in 2004. This in itself created a very unusual environment for the IP model of education to be applied (and by extension, the design and implementation of the Humanities Curriculum) and the same would apply to the processes behind its curriculum reforms.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Documentary Data

The documentary data that was referred to in this case was the policy document that drove the IH programme in HCI (High School Section). Major areas of focus while analysing the document included its authorship (who was/were responsible for producing the text and under what influences), the type of policy document it represented (content and language), its degree of access (how available it is to people other than the author(s) and its meaning (explicit and implicit). This form of data was used in conjunction with data from interviews and observation to answer the research questions. In this instance, the documentary data was important in triangulation, “where an intersecting set of different methods and data types is used in a single project” (Denzin, 1989 quoted in Punch, 2005: 184) to validate the empirical results.

3.2.2 Personal Interviews

Semi-structured personal and focused group interviews were also conducted with Humanities teachers and students respectively who represented the consumers of the IH policy paper, and in some cases, were agents of change in the policy process. Conducting semi-structured personal interviews with the teachers provided a certain degree of flexibility and variation in the data collection process so that particular social and/or political contextual influences may be allowed to emerge, which sometimes may not be evident through “pre-established questions, with preset response categories” (Punch, 2005: 170).

³ SAP schools were those identified by the government in the late 1970s as schools which were strong bastions of traditional Chinese culture. These schools have since offered the study of English and Chinese Languages at first language levels in order to produce effectively bilingual graduates, who are exposed to western ideas while maintaining a strong link to their Chinese roots.

Focused group interviews were adopted for students partly out of the constraint of time, in order for a “one-shot collection” of data from this group of respondents (Berg, 2004: 123). Another reason for adopting this style of interview for students was an attempted reduction in the stress and intensity that may be faced by them should the interviews be conducted on a personal basis. Additionally, it allowed for a more stimulated level of discussion (which approximated that of class discussion commonly undertaken in daily classroom instructions) that hopefully yielded more critical insights to the questions and issues raised.

Each interview session lasted at between about an hour for teachers and about 40 minutes for students, the latter a shorter period of time due to their shorter attention spans and more limited roles played in the policy process than teachers. The interview questions comprised a mix of structured questions and open-ended prompts to illicit fluid discussion with the interviewees, with more specific questions being generated in the process, depending on the thread of the discussion (refer to Appendices 3A to 3C for the interview questions and 3D for the interview schedule). Interview notes were taken during the interview process, and where permission was available, interviewees’ responses were tape-recorded.

A total of one and a-half months were spent collecting data through such personal interviews and access to interviewees (both in terms of seeking permission for the interviews and the conduct of interviews) was relatively easy as I am a teacher in the Institution. The Interviews were conducted in the Institution’s counselling room for Humanities teachers and the Career Guidance room in the library for the students. The locations were chosen for their relative privacy so that the interviewees would feel at ease to speak freely and candidly. They were also informed of their interview schedules one week in advance personally, and were given a brief overview of the purpose of my study and interview. This was an attempt to establish rapport prior to the interview.

3.2.3 Classroom Observations

Classroom observations provided data with respect to the ‘new’ way of teaching and learning the Humanities in the school and its impacts. It allowed me to understand the degree of success of the policy towards curriculum reform, through observation for purported changes in attitudes and mindsets towards the learning and teaching of Humanities as laid out in the IH policy document.

It occurred in the form of naturalistic observation, where “observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behaviour of those whom they are observing” (Punch, 2005: 179). In other words, “the situation being observed is not contrived for research purposes” (2005: 179). To minimise the level of disruption to the class and possible discomfort of the teachers and students involved in the observation, note taking in one inconspicuous corner of the classroom was used as the main method of information recording. Permission of the teachers involved was also sought prior to the observation and reassurance was given to them that the observation was purely intended for this academic exercise only and that their names and subject matter taught in class will not be mentioned.

3.3 Sampling

“Purposive sampling” (Punch, 2005: 187) was adopted in this study to determine who was to be interviewed and observed. It was important that the sampling plan covered those who might be involved in the policy process in one way or another, be it producers or consumers of the policy. As presented by Punch (2005: 188) “the sampling plan and sampling parameters (settings, actors, events, processes) should line up with the purposes and

the research questions of the study”. To this end, the Humanities teachers and senior students of the school (those in Years 3 and 4 in 2006) were identified as the main actors to be interviewed and observed in classrooms.

The choice of Humanities teachers was obvious, they being directly involved in the production and/or consumption of the IH policy paper. Senior students were selected for their maturity not only intellectually, but also in terms of their participation in IP in the school. These students will be into their third and fourth year in IP in 2006 (the Year 3s joining the IP from Year 1, while the Year 4s joining the IP only from Year 2, on account of the implementation year of IP being 2004). Thus these 2 groups of students will not only possess sufficient experience in IP and in the IH programme, but also the vocabulary to participate in the interview process.

Owing to time and logistical constraints, a total of four teachers from the Humanities department were selected for interviews, one from each of the subject areas of Geography, History and Literature. In addition, the principal author and co-ordinator of the IH policy paper was also interviewed.

Due to the fact that HCI’s high school section is divided into four different consortia, each functioning like a mini-school and looking after about 400 students, 4 students were selected from each consortia to be interviewed, making a total of 16 student respondents in all. Although these numbers may not necessarily provide a representative voice in terms of the results obtained, it nevertheless provided me with a preliminary feel of the effects of the policy on its main audience.

3.4 Data Analyses

3.4.1 Analysis of Collected Data

In analysing the data collected for this study, the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework for qualitative data analysis was adopted. Essentially, there were three main components towards analysis: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch, 2005). Though the components will be discussed separately below for the sake of presentation, it is vital to note that these three components are interwoven and occur concurrently in the data analysis process.

The voluminous data collected needed to be ‘reduced’ or distilled to prepare them for higher levels of abstraction so as to turn indicators into first-order concepts, second-order concepts and so on for conceptual development, which in turn was facilitated by the comparison of data. To help in data reduction, coding and memoing as two basic operations were used. Coding refers to the process of “putting name tags, names or labels against pieces of data” (Punch, 2005: 199) and can proceed from descriptive codes to inferential (pattern codes) in higher order codes.

Memoing may complement coding which can help direct the researcher towards new emerging patterns, leading to a higher level of pattern coding and thus higher levels of abstraction of data. Memos may be substantive, theoretical or even personal (Punch, 2005) and in the words of Miles and Huberman (1994: 72, quoted in Punch, 2005: 201) are “the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding”.

Data reduction was aided through data displays, which helped “organise, compress and assemble information” (Punch, 2005: 198). A variety of ways were used to display data for my own reference, including the use of charts, graphs and diagrams.

Conclusion drawing and verification represented the third part of qualitative data analysis, where propositions (emerging conclusions) were developed after integrating previous analyses (Punch, 2005). However, it is important to note that this phase may occur concurrently with data reduction and display.

3.4.2 Policy Text Analysis

The IH policy document was also analysed along the lines of social production and social organisation of the document. The series of questions raised by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 173, quoted in Punch, 2005: 227) was used as a guide in the analysis: How was the document written? What was recorded? How was it read? Who wrote it? Who read it? For what purposes? With what outcomes?

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations permeated the entire research process, from the initial stages of conceiving the study through to addressing issues that might arise after the completion of the study. Along the way, steps have been taken to ensure that the code of conduct and ethics were not compromised.

3.5.1 Issues at the Start of the Study

One of the most important issues to address at the start of this study was gaining the consent of the participants of the study. This included teachers, students and the administration of the school, whose permission I needed to seek and to whom I needed to provide information with regards to the objectives of this study. Letters were sent out to these groups of people to invite them to participate in the study and formal consent sought before proceeding with the data collection (refer to Appendices 4A and 4B).

3.5.2 Issues in the course of the Study

The main task at this point in time was to ensure confidentiality in the information provided by the respondents, especially in areas that might be considered sensitive. To this end, anonymity was offered to the respondents by not using their real names in the research report. Instead descriptions like Teacher A, Teacher B (to represent teachers’ view), Group A and Group B (to represent students’ views collated from focus group interviews) have been adopted. The names of the students who participated in the focus group interviews were also not recorded. This served to also build trust between the respondents and interviewer so that information supplied could be forthcoming.

Permission to interview respondents and to record down notes during interviews, be it handwritten notes or a tape recording of their response was sought out of courtesy and respect for them. Additionally, consent was also sought in using any of such information provided by them in the research report.

3.5.3 Issues after the Study

The integrity and quality of this piece of research has to be ensured at all times. In order to do so, careful thought was put into the process of conducting this study, from the crafting of research questions, to interview questions, to creating the most appropriate tone and mood

during the interview process (for example, by taking care of the needs of the respondents), to analyses and re-analyses of collected data in order to validate the results.

Hence, it is imperative that the results of this study be used appropriately and not as an avenue for ‘witch hunting’ – to sieve out those who may not necessarily concur with the views of and decisions made by the higher management of the school. Permission ought to be sought from the researcher should there be a need to apply the results of this study outside the realm of an academic exercise, so that the researcher can be aware of the nature of use of the results to honour the confidentiality promised to the study’s respondents and to safeguard the integrity of the study’s empirical results.

4 The Integrated Humanities Programme – The Policy Text

The policy text for the IH Programme was completed at the end of 2003, for implementation in 2004. It was spearheaded by the then Senior Education Consultant (equivalent to a senior department head) for Humanities, whose designation had since been renamed Principal Consultant or PC (Humanities).

This text essentially described the rationale for, objectives and approach of the IH structure and curriculum in the school, hence it may be best described as a material-procedural policy text. The aim of this programme is “to restore the holistic essence of the Humanities, by removing the artificial divisions between Geography, History, Literature and Economics” (Ng, 2003: 3). It is hoped that students will appreciate the inter-related nature of Humanities education through thematic studies that surface theories and concepts across the Humanities disciplines. Through this, it is hoped that students will have a “total integrated experience in the study of Humanities” (Ng, 2003: 3).

4.1 Context of Influence – The Global-Local Dynamics

The need to revise the curriculum framework and the teaching and learning of the Humanities in HCI came as a response to the school’s decision to offer an alternative, and purportedly better education experience to the incumbent ‘O’ level system. This move was in turn made in response to MOE’s call to provide a more diverse and flexible schooling system in order to cater to the varied abilities of students, as well as to prepare them adequately to meet the demands of an increasingly unpredictable world.

In April 2002, MOE formed the Junior College (JC)/Upper Secondary Education Review Committee (ERC) to develop a revised JC curriculum framework and articulate a vision for JC/Upper Secondary education, including the appropriate structures, types of programmes to be offered, and the mix of schools to deliver these programmes. The report by ERC was tabled as a White Paper to be debated in Parliament in October 2002.

The pressing need to prepare the next generation of Singaporeans to meet the challenges posed by “an era of innovation-driven growth, and frequent and unpredictable change in the economic and social environment” (ERS, 2002: i) was largely recorded as a justification for such a revamp in the JC/Upper Secondary education in the report. In addition to this national-survival rhetoric, the report also highlighted the astute planning of the state in preparing schools to undertake the paradigm shift in schooling model:

“Changes and improvements in recent years, including the ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ initiative, have set in motion new mindsets in schools and JCs, better oriented to innovation. However, further

improvements in the quality of the JC and secondary school system will require new structures and curricula, not just new methods and technologies.”

(ERS, 2002: i)

Prior to the completion of the ERC report, there were already indications that a major shake-up of the education system in Singapore was in the pipeline. The increased awareness of the accelerated process of globalisation, with its associated social, economic and political effects provided the impetus for such a change (refer to section 1.1.1). In an official address to graduating teacher-trainees during their investiture in early 2002, Mr Shanmugaratnam (presently Singapore’s Minister for Education) emphasised the importance of preparing for a new future, which to him is “a world defined by change and uncertainty, but also of immense opportunity” (The Straits Times, 2004). This underlined the state’s forceful rhetoric of needing to survive and thrive in a new world order that seems to be predicated more on an ability-driven and value-creation model than the previous emphasis on efficiency, an argument put forth earlier by Daun (2002):

“Almost everywhere in the world, educational systems are now under the pressure to produce individuals for global competition, individuals who can themselves compete for their own positions in the global context, and who can legitimate the state and strengthen its global competitiveness”

(Daun, 2002: 1)

Hence, the ability of Singapore to “legitimise” herself and “strengthen her global competitiveness” will largely depend on her education sector’s ability to transform her human resources.

4.2 Alignment of IH policy with that of IP in general

An analysis of the IH policy text reveals a deliberate alignment with MOE’s policy of IP in schools, which in turn had been informed by wider global politico-economic trends and changes. The aim to nurture those who possess the necessary prerequisites to be “able to adapt and to thrive on change” (The Straits Times, 2004) in order to survive and succeed in the new world was reflected in the objectives of the IH programme to:

“... develop problem-solving and decision-making skills”
“... be able to see issues with systemic thinking – with a broadened and deepened understanding.”
“... enable them to create relationships among various sources of information, so that new knowledge become integrated with previously learned information.”

(Ng, 2003: 5)

Pedagogic practices recommended in the policy text also serves to prepare students to cope with an increasingly complex world, through authentic learning experiences that connect theory with real-world applications.

*“The Integrated Humanities thematic instructional design allows pupils to contemplate issues and situations that reflect the world as they know it. Exploration and discovery become paramount; the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge is secondary, and pupils learn about the world of Nature and Man through **exploration, discovery, analysis and synthesis**, among other ways.”*

(Ng, 2003: 25, emphases my own)

The dismantling of the artificial boundaries between the different humanities subjects in the school mirrors that of the transnational dimensions of globalisation articulated by Hobsbawm (1994), who viewed state territories and state frontiers as not the basic frameworks that make up the world today. In encouraging students to see beyond arbitrary boundaries in subject domains, it is hoped that they would develop the ability to analyse situations and information from multiple perspectives. This would place them in a good stead to tackle real-world complex problems and make informed conclusions and decisions. After all, they will be the individual-level actors, such as professionals and consultants who will be the market makers (as opposed to market takers) that command the new economy (Stromquist, 2002).

4.3 Context of Policy Text Production – Processes, Product and Agents of Change

4.3.1 Context of Policy Text Production – Processes of Change

The process of curriculum evolution in HCI is ever continuous, even before the introduction of IP. Besides offering the standard fare of ‘O’ level subjects before IP, there were also a host of enrichment specialist programmes to cater to the varied interests of the students, especially in the area of Mathematics, Science and Information Technology (IT) research programmes. This was in part made possible through the school gaining ‘independent’ status from MOE in 1988.

The chief actors involved in curriculum change and revision are usually the Education Consultants (ECs) and Senior Consultants (SCs) (the equivalent of level heads or senior subject teachers) in conjunction with teachers in the relevant departments. This was also largely true in the (re)development of the Humanities curriculum in IP. The PC (Humanities) was invited by the IP steering committee in the school as early as 2002 to ‘provide opinions’ on the suggested curriculum model for the Humanities. Having heard his comments and proposals, the committee then tasked him to spearhead the (re)development of the Humanities curriculum, formalising the process through a concept paper (of which the PC (Humanities) was the author) that will inform teachers in the Humanities department as well as others, the rationale for such a (re)development and the eventual structure of the curriculum.

The protocol in initiating a curriculum change in the Humanities in the school was similar to that made known to Vidovich and Donoghue (2003). Proposals of the curriculum were presented to the Dean of Studies, who ensured the compliance and alignment of the new curriculum with MOE’s specifications related to the conduct of IP in schools. These were then presented to the Studies Committee (comprising SCs), where amendments were recommended and recorded. The final endorsement of the concept paper then came from the Principal’s Committee (comprising the principal, vice-principals and the school’s senior administrators) before the finalised policy text was announced to the teaching staff members.

4.3.1.1 Challenges Encountered in the Process of Policy Text Production

Throughout the process of policy text production, there were several challenges that emerged. One of them involved the practical need to strike a balance between an enriched IP curriculum that ridded itself of the shackles of a national curriculum with one that prepared students adequately for the GCE ‘A’ level examinations at the end of Year Six. In the words of the PC (Humanities):

“Because of the need to strike a balance between the IP curriculum and a curriculum that prepares the students for the ‘A’ levels, there was a tension between freedom and basic skills and knowledge for the ‘A’ levels. They somehow don’t reconcile.”

(Personal Interview, 4 May 2006, PC (Humanities))

It was also a difficult process trying to convince the JC section of the institution that the objective of ‘exposing’ the students in the high school section to the Humanities through means that were not normally done in schools offering the traditional GCE ‘O’ level track (that is exam-based drilling and skills) was sufficient preparation for the students to take up the Humanities at ‘A’ level standards. It was with this in mind that a Humanities Programme was established in the high school section to enable those who would like to enrol in the Humanities Programme or specialise in the Humanities in the JC an opportunity to not only develop their passion in the Humanities, but also to hone their examination skills simultaneously.

A second challenge that was thrown up was that of manpower constraints. According to the PC (Humanities), the institution was unwilling to allocate a few teachers to specifically design a new curriculum, preferring that teachers do that alongside their usual teaching load and other portfolios. The rationale for that was that it was crucial for curriculum designers to own not only the process but also the product of their own efforts, in order to ensure an impassioned, hence effective implementation of the new curriculum. Having a separate group of curriculum designers was deemed not to achieve that end. In the end, it became a very taxing endeavour for those involved in the (re)development of the curriculum.

A third challenge came about when the IP was extended to include HCI’s sister school. Macro level alignment of the objectives, structure and assessment formats and standards of various new curriculum models had to be done across three schools in all subject areas, which was an onerous administrative, management and logistic task. In the area of the Humanities, it was eventually decided that only specific skills and not content will be aligned, as it was felt by those involved that the former was more crucial as they provided the basic foundation for higher order comprehension of materials.

4.3.2 Context of Policy Text Production – Product of Change

When news of the acceptance by MOE of the school’s IP proposal was announced, there was general excitement amongst the teachers and administrators in the school. The ability to bypass the ‘O’ level examinations spelt immense potential, not only in academic fields but in non-academic ones as well, to develop and immerse in programmes that will provide students with a much more enjoyable and authentic learning experience than cramming for examinations. Keeping to the usual protocol in curriculum development and planning, the effort was spearheaded by the SCs of each of the humanities subject (Geography, History and Literature), with the appointment of a PC (Humanities) to oversee the whole process and later the implementation of the new IH programme.

Immediately, the department saw the curriculum revamp as an opportunity to raise the 'status' of the Humanities in the school. Excel Institution's students have hitherto been very successful and even famous for their academic prowess in the areas of Mathematics, Science and IT. The Humanities had always taken a backseat, although students performed relatively well in them as well, in national examinations, quizzes and competition. This was summed up by the PC (Humanities):

“In the earlier days, our students studied Humanities for the sake of studying them, to score in the ‘O’ levels. The new Humanities curriculum allowed us to play a balancing role between the Maths and Sciences in the school. It has always been a school culture that the Maths and Sciences played a more dominant role.”

(Personal Interview, 4 May 2006, PC (Humanities))

A decision was made to dismantle boundaries that kept each humanities subject to its specific domain and the introduction of an “integrated approach” (Ng, 2003) towards the teaching and learning of humanities – hence the term Integrated Humanities. The primary argument behind this move was to “restore the holistic essence of the Humanities” so that students can explore the “inter-relatedness of all knowledge through multiple intersecting perspectives” in order to have “a total integrated experience in the study of the Humanities” (Ng, 2003: 3). It is clear from this that the rhetoric behind the re-organisation of the teaching and learning of the Humanities was to communicate to the students that a study of the Humanities offers them immense scope and challenge, comparable to that which they may get from the hard sciences and Mathematics. The underlying aim was to increase the 'value' of conducting humanistic studies, reflecting the department's effort at re-allocating values through decisions and actions (Taylor et. al., 1997).

The IH curriculum comprises **core** and **elective** modules, where key concepts and knowledge are covered in the former, while the latter provides opportunities for students to acquire in-depth knowledge in non-traditional subject areas like Media Studies and Post-Colonial Literature (Ng, 2003). The syllabus for the core module is arranged around National Education (NE) themes, thus complying with the ministry's requirement that IP schools continue to feature NE components in the Humanities, especially in Social Studies, which is a compulsory subject in all non-IP schools. The availability of elective modules (three per semester where students pick one) also serves as a 'hook' to raise students' levels of enthusiasm in the Humanities, since they were designed to fulfil the particular passion areas of the students that may rest outside the traditional content covered in schools.

Perhaps the most 'revolutionary' aspect of the IH curriculum is the abolishing of examinations, replacing it by a Major Research Paper, renamed the Humanities Research Paper (HRP) in 2006 that students will spend 8 months in a year completing. The HRP requires students to undertake literature-based research in any topic of their choice, governed by a theme (different for different levels). It is inter-disciplinary in nature, where students are expected to integrate at least 2 Humanities subjects. It is an on-going form of assessment by teachers and it culminates in a written research paper and oral defence exercise. By removing the pressure of sitting for a year-end examination and the reluctance of studying for topics/subjects that do not appeal, it is hoped that students will find the Humanities more engaging and interesting.

Regular tests are still conducted to ascertain the students' level of understanding and competence in fundamental concepts. However, these have been capped at one per term. Another component of assessment, which had been adopted before IP was introduced was expanded in IP – Activities for Curriculum Enhancement or ACE. These are student-initiated learning activities that will allow them to further and deepen their knowledge in the Humanities which may not be necessarily covered in the official syllabi. The assessment model in the IH programme may be summarised in the table overleaf (it should be noted that there has been a slight adjustment to the assessment model since the its implementation in 2004, the primary change being that HRP is no longer compulsory for all students as it is undertaken by those who are deemed more academically able as determined by their academic grades. Those who do not qualify take a year-end examination in the Humanities instead):

Table 1: *Assessment modes in IH* (based on 2004 model)

Assessment Mode	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
	Formal Assessments	Informal Assessments	Consolidation
	30%	30%	40%
Humanities	Term Tests	Pupil-initiated learning activities, informal checks through quizzes, competitions, projects, discussions, etc.	Humanities Research Paper (with Oral Defence)

In summary, the design of the IH curriculum not only aims to improve the standing of the Humanities in the school, it was also done to fulfil the ministry's rationale of introducing IP. Through content, processes and assessments, the IH programme aims to develop students' "capacities for creative and critical thinking" and also their "intellectual curiosity" so that they may acquire a "broad-based education" (ERC, 2002: 25).

4.3.3 Context of Policy Text Production – Agents of Change

Due to the fact that the revision to the standing Humanities curriculum was part of a larger process of curriculum revamp to facilitate the implementation of IP, various stakeholders were involved in the policy process. They included the PCs, ECs, SCs, members of the Principals' Committee, the Board of Governors (BOGs) of the school, an external Advisory Committee (comprising academics from The National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University's National Institute of Education), as well as the teachers in the Humanities department in both the high school and college sections. Each group of people was involved in different capacities and to different extents in the formulation of the IH Concept Paper. However, they each brought with them particular agenda to the policy formulation table.

For example, the Humanities department in the college section was concerned with how the revamped Humanities syllabi would align with that of the college's curriculum, while the school's BOGs (many of them old boys of the school) were interested in the quality and rigour of the academic programmes being run in the school. These two groups played a consultative role in the revamp of the curriculum and were not actively involved in making changes.

Nevertheless, the involvement of multiple parties like teachers from the college section of the institution and the BOGs in the IH policy process was a clear example of what Ozga (2000: 2) described as the “struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making.” Their input on the IH curriculum structure had to be sought as they each had a vested interest in the programmes run in the school and due process in policy formulation had to be accorded to them not least as an act of inclusion, as well as a form of respect.

Even though the overarching structure of the IH curriculum in terms of processes and modes of assessment was laid out in the IH Concept Paper, the design of syllabi were very much left to individual teachers. It was at this micro level of developing the various Humanities syllabi where the three teachers I interviewed revealed they felt most included in the policy process. All of them did not participate directly in the initial formulation of the concept paper (macro level policy formulation), as they were not part of the committee that was formed to do that. However all three agreed that the department sort to be as inclusive as possible by soliciting for regular feedback on matters like the proposed revamped curriculum structure and developed syllabi, even when they were works-in-progress during weekly professional sharing time. Thus, they played a consultative role even as they were not directly involved in the policy process.

The manner in which the IH curriculum framework and syllabi was drawn up reflects the trend of decentralisation in educational governance. Karlsen (2000) distinguished between decentralisation as *delegation* and *devolution*. Delegation usually involves “a transmission of tasks and administrative responsibilities related to specific functions, usually defined by central authorities” (Karlsen, 2000: 526). Essentially this does not entail a shift in power and existing power relations still prevail. This is because local agents are only given the role of executing decisions made at a central level (Karlsen, 2000).

This was the case with the design of the Humanities syllabi by selected teachers (local agents) in the department, where they were guided by the rationale and objectives spelt out in the IH Concept Paper. At the same time, the school also had an obligation towards fulfilling the NE requirements specified by MOE, which was done through Social Studies in non-IP schools. This presented another instance where teachers had to work within the confines set forth by “central authorities”. Nonetheless, Karlsen (2000: 526) also reflected that “delegation may indicate an extended local autonomy simply because total central control is difficult.” Therefore, teachers who were tasked with the design of the Humanities syllabi had in them a certain level of autonomy in determining the content and processes in teaching and learning, engendering a feeling of empowerment, as reflected by two of the teachers interviewed:

“I felt that a lot of autonomy was given to me as I wrote my syllabus and scheme of work. In the end there were only very minor adjustments to what I had prepared and suggested... I was even given the go-ahead to change a particular module’s assessment model!”

(Personal Interview, 2 May 2006, Teacher C)

“There were no restrictions at the outset when we were told to design new syllabuses (sic). We revamped to fit a new educational model.”

(Personal Interview, 25 April 2006, Teacher B)

On the other hand, decentralisation as devolution may also involve the “transmission of authority and real responsibility from central to local bodies” (Karlsen, 2000: 526). This can be observed in the case of inviting teachers to develop elective modules, where they had total control over the subject matter and processes. In this way, the department hoped to develop what Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998: 35) called “pedagogic professionalism” in teacher’s work and to establish some semblance of “democracy of local participation”, so that teachers feel included in the policy process.

5 Context of Practice

At the point of writing, it had been two-and-a-half years since the implementation of the IH programme, following the guidelines laid out in the IH Concept Paper, with mixed reactions and results. Such unpredictability in policy effects comes as a result of policy being a product of struggles and compromises (Vidovich, 2002), that experiences what Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992: 21) described as “material constraints and possibilities.” Responses to policy as text thus have “real” consequences that are usually experienced within the context of policy practice (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992). This chapter discusses the issues raised from the implementation of the IH programme and examines the extent to which the objectives of the programme as spelt out in the IH Concept Paper is materialised

5.1 The Teaching and Learning of the Humanities

All three teachers interviewed agreed that the extent to which the objectives of the IH programme were achieved varied. They observed that on the whole, the new IH curriculum placed a premium on skills, rather than content, justifying the PC (Humanities)’s claim that the content is merely a medium for understanding. This is facilitated by the issues-based approach towards the teaching and learning of the Humanities, where students’ critical, creative and caring thinking⁴ skills were developed and honed, in addition to the development of real-world life skills like oratorical skills, people management skills and project management skills.

The emphasis on skills-based teaching and learning was also enhanced by a shift from a largely teacher-centred pedagogy to a student-centred one, where independent and experiential forms of learning were encouraged (borne out in two lesson observations conducted in the course of this study). This enabled to a certain extent, a transition from an emphasis on product to process, as reflected by two teacher respondents:

“With IP as a new model for education, I think teachers made much more efforts at engaging the students in learning. I feel we now try and make it (learning) more student-centred and process-oriented than in the ‘O’ level days.”

(Personal Interview, 25 April 2006, Teacher B)

“There is now more room for experimentation with the students I feel. I feel more comfortable not just pumping content but focus more on skills”

(Personal Interview, 20 April 2006, Teacher A)

⁴ Critical, creative and caring thinking are dimensions that are included within the institution’s model for education under IP.

The greater emphasis on student-centred pedagogy, focusing more on skills than content under the new IH curriculum was not lost on the students. Three of the four student focus groups interviewed mentioned that as a key feature of the IH programme and there was an unequivocal agreement amongst them that such an approach enlivened the process of learning in the classroom and helped promote greater interactivity between teachers and students and between students themselves:

“... for example, we do things like group work, class discussions, oral presentation and I think it helps us learn better because the learning experience is better if we do things by ourselves.”

(Focus Group Interview, 6 April 2006, Group A)

“The teaching style is more open. While there is still an emphasis on content, thinking skills are also now emphasised. They (thinking skills) serve as a basis for understanding so that we can learn how to make inferences”

(Focus Group Interview, 11 April 2006, Group B)

Hence, the objectives of equipping students with the skills to “build upon their current knowledge base and connect what they know with what they are learning”, as well as “important life-long skills” (Ng, 2003: 5) have to a large extent been realised.

5.2 Greater Variety

A greater variety of content matter had been made available to the students since the implementation of the IH curriculum in 2004, chiefly through the elective modules offered each semester. This effectively expanded the students’ options and allowed them to exercise choice in pursuing areas that they are at least interested in:

“The IH Electives allow one to capitalise on his strength. Different types of electives offer different skills.”

(Focus Group Interview, 6 April 2006, Group A)

As a result, greater flexibility had been injected into the curriculum, “sanctioning” teachers and students to explore content that were not traditionally covered in the GCE ‘O’ levels syllabi. There is a drawback to this as highlighted by the students interviewed. Some reflected that because the scope for the Humanities have now been expanded, there had been times when the exact area of coverage for a topic or a subject was not clearly made known. It became a source of duress during formal assessments like class tests.

The greater variety in content matter concurred with one of the objectives of the IH programme, where students are to be provided with the “opportunity to explore their interests and abilities” so as to “subsequently make choices to further nurture their areas of passion.” (Ng, 2003: 5). However, an unintended consequence was affording teachers, especially those who developed the elective modules a similar platform for them to leverage on their respective academic interest areas.

5.3 Assessment

Both teachers and students interviewed felt that it is in the area of assessment where the most striking change has occurred. Under the revamped curriculum, a research paper (HRP) replaced the Humanities examinations in order to better assess students' ability to apply conceptual knowledge in an interdisciplinary manner, and at the same instance create new knowledge through the syntheses and critical evaluation of old ones (one of the objectives laid out in the Concept Paper):

“Replacing the exams with HRP was the most obvious change in IP. I think it is helpful as it allows students to conceptualise at a higher level than exams can provide... also allows students to explore topics that they are interested in, but may not be covered in class ”

(Personal Interview, 2 May 2006 Teacher C)

“HRP is an accurate measure of what one is truly capable of in Humanities. We need to set our own scope and focus and it emphasises quality over quantity... not like tests where standard answers are expected.”

(Focus Group Interview, 11 April 2006 Group B)

As much as the HRP is a boon to teachers and students, it can also prove to be a bane to the former. Amongst the issues raised were the apparent disparities amongst teacher-mentors in the standards expected of the paper and the suitability and readiness of students doing HRP. Although the assessment of the research paper is done through standardisation exercises amongst teacher-mentors, based on a set of rubrics that are internally designed and modified over the years, the adherence to the standards agreed upon in those exercises cannot be assumed. This has resulted in the study body segregating the teacher-mentors into two camps – the lenient and strict ones.

The teachers interviewed also expressed the general opinion that not every student is suitable for research. Hence, when HRP was first introduced in 2004 as a compulsory replacement for examinations, there were numerous cases where students did not do well in it. In 2006, it was decided that HRP would only be attempted by academically able students in Years 3 and 4 of the IP (equivalent to upper secondary levels), with the hopes of improving the quality of research papers received. The rest who are not doing HRP will sit for examinations.

Besides HRP, ACE provided another platform for student assessment. While laudable in its original intent – to promote independent, self-directed learning, teachers often lament that the spirit does not match up with the form. Common grouses amongst teachers included the lack of motivation amongst students to complete their ACE activities, until the loom of deadlines or upon discovery of the lack of ACE points accumulated to do well in IH, as well as the fact that often enough, ACE which is to all intents and purposes student-initiated became teacher-initiated to combat the lethargy of the students in initiating the activities. Thus, this appears to contradict the spirit of independent learning mooted in the concept paper, as students clearly still required a fair bit of scaffolding in the learning process.

5.4 Teachers' and Students' Levels of Readiness

The new IH curriculum requires teachers and students to cast aside previous notions of educational processes and goals to embrace a new paradigm of educational practice that is at once exciting and progressive as it is revolutionary and intimidating. IP is exciting and progressive since it offers valuable opportunities for students' academic enhancements while fulfilling their interests in particular areas, without the constraints of a curriculum that is geared towards an examination that measures education outcomes through a singular dimension. IP is also revolutionary and intimidating as it threatens to completely usurp traditional mindsets in educational practices that both teachers and students in Singapore are long accustomed to. As such, not everyone in the institution can be assumed to embrace the curriculum reform equally and be the beneficiaries of change to the same extent.

"I think one of the main things that has cropped up in the new IH curriculum is whether the students, and in some cases teachers are ready for it... some teachers might find it a bit too overwhelming in IP since we don't operate in a familiar setting anymore, like we used to know exactly what to do and expect in the 'O' level system."

(Personal Interview, 20 April 2006, Teacher A)

"In IP, we tend to do things in a new way. For example, more experiential learning and less hand-holding for our students. I must admit that not all my students are ready for that. There are still those who quite frankly speaking, still require that kind of structure found in the 'O' level days... they are confused to the extent that they are paralysed."

(Personal Interview, 2 May 2006, Teacher C)

It appears that while some teachers and students may subscribe conceptually to the philosophy of an IP education, they are less inclined to embody it in practice. This may account for instances when students were deemed to be "problematic" as teachers perceived them to lack the intrinsic motivation to be proactive in their work. In fact, one of the teachers interviewed mentioned that the new education model (IP) segregated the student body into two camps – those who are poised to excel in the new system and those who simply cannot do so:

"Very obviously, IP has divided the student population generally into two groups. There are those who will definitely benefit from such a system and excel because they are very proactive and take a keen interest in their learning process and progress. At the same time, there are others who just can't be bothered."

(Personal Interview, 20 April, Teacher A)

The success of the IH curriculum reform, where the blueprint is provided for through the IH Concept Paper will rest in part on both teachers' and students' levels of readiness to leverage on the opportunities afforded by IP.

5.5 Teacher Accountability versus Student Accountability

Apart from assessment, teacher accountability for educational outcome was a consistent issue brought up in the interviews with teachers. All of them felt that for a system that

purportedly is moving away from being product-oriented to process-oriented, a great deal of emphasis is still placed on the academic results of students. What compounds this seeming irony is that fact that teachers are held largely accountable for their students' academic performance. This has resulted in a certain amount of duress and exasperation experienced by teachers in the Humanities department. As one of the interviewees commented:

“We are still held largely responsible for our students’ results in tests and exams. When our classes don’t perform up to expectations, we are required to explain why to the management and we are not supposed to attribute their (students’) poor performance to reasons like “attitude problem” or “laziness”. But some of them really do not do well because of the reasons mentioned! ... I feel that I am answerable for their performance when they (students) should be the ones taking ownership and assuming responsibility over their studies”

(Personal Interview, 25 April 2006, Teacher B)

The general sentiment amongst those interviewed appeared to be that while there undoubtedly needs to be some form of accountability by teachers in the course of their work (as this is a mark of professionalism and responsibility in any line of work), they should not be subject to the burden of proof when things go awry, especially in the area of students' academic performance, or lack thereof, something that they feel they may not necessarily have any control over, especially on-the-spot performances in tests and examinations. Feelings of resentment may accumulate over time and staff morale adversely affected if teachers are made to perceive that they have to constantly bear the brunt of the institution's inability to achieve desired outcomes.

There are also fears that if teachers were to assume too much accountability over their students' learning outcomes, the students may take it for granted and lose the sense of self-direction and independence that the IP system attempts to inculcate in them.

6 Threading it Together: “Bigger Picture” Discussion

HCI (High School Section) has always been regarded as a forerunner in curriculum innovation, educational management and leadership in Singapore. After gaining 'independent' status from the ministry in 1988, the school had been able to experiment with and develop numerous academic and non-academic programmes to tailor to the needs and stretch the potential of its academically able students. Some of these programmes included overseas camp experience, combined with Community Involvement activities, Learning and Research Centres in the areas of Photonics, Life Sciences, Mathematics and English Language, as well as securing working partnerships with tertiary institutions in Singapore and other high schools in China, Australia, Malaysia and most recently, India. Therefore, it is no surprise that the school was eager to adopt a new model of education that could potentially offer more opportunities and flexibility for academic and non-academic developments for its students.

6.1 Context of Influence for IH Policy

The introduction of IP in the school, which in turn guided the revamp of the Humanities curriculum signalled its ability to align its educational mission with wider national aims, to achieve educational excellence. This was a similar sentiment echoed in a study by Vidovich and Donoghue (2003). Undoubtedly, the school was proactive in riding the waves of

globalisation and the ‘new world order’ that it generates to prepare its students for a world where change, innovation and enterprise become the new constant. The contextualisation of the need for educational reform that led to the production of the IH policy text had been outlined earlier in Sections 1.1.1, 4.1 and 4.2. It should be highlighted here that that global, national and local influences were key factors in pushing for the need to reform in the Humanities curriculum that led to the production of the IH policy text as a blueprint for such an endeavour.

6.2 Agents of Change

6.2.1 Policy as Discourse

Section 4.3.3 highlighted the various stakeholders’ involved in the production of the IH policy text, and revealed the politics behind policy formulation. This constructs the IH reform policy as a series of discourses where “interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education” (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992: 19) - in this case in the area of the teaching and learning of the Humanities in Excel Institution. The policy text (IH Concept Paper) then became a site of contestation where different interest groups competed to establish their “currency”, “credence” and “lexicon for policy initiation” (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992: 20).

The numerous meetings amongst the senior management staff members of the school (involving staff members from both the high school and college sections), as well as with members of the school’s BOG was a platform to facilitate political debates over issues concerning reform. As suggested by Levin (2001), such meetings are where conflicts over both the intent and implementation of policies are debated, so as to shape discourses about educational issues (Ball, 1990). This further entrenches the notion of policy production as a highly contested process, nuanced with a great deal of power struggle and attempted hegemonic influences.

6.2.2 Teachers’ Empowerment

Professional empowerment of teachers was evident in the process of designing syllabi and schemes of work for the various IH modules, since they were given a relative free hand in selecting the content matter that they felt would benefit the students. As such, they were able to leverage on their ‘specialist’ knowledge and interest areas in the writing of those modules. This showcased the centrality of teachers in the curriculum reform process of the school.

However, this sense of empowerment did not extend to the wider process of determining the IH curriculum philosophy and structure. Teachers in the department felt that they inherited the policy rather than being a part of it, as the IH framework was worked out by the PC (Humanities), together with the IP Steering Committee prior to its dissemination to the rest of the department via professional sharing sessions. This may have resulted in some forms of dislocation between the department as a whole and the policy process, rendering the reading of the policy as officious and instructional to a large extent, and to a smaller extent as an empowering tool (since the policy text did not dictate rigidly what teachers must do).

6.2.3 Students’ Empowerment

Ozga (2000) noted that students could also be policy makers and in this case, students in the school played an integral part in the modification of the IH programme, especially in the area of assessment. Feedback was sought from the students periodically and this had resulted in changes to the proportionality of each type of assessment in determining the overall IH grade. For example the weightings of class tests and ACE in the overall result of IH had been

adjusted downwards from 30% to 25%. Likewise, teachers had not been passive consumers of the IH policy framework. Regular feedback had been given to the school administration with regards to the rigour, standards and effectiveness of the programme.

6.3 Issues Related to Accountability

Accountability has become a much used and often much feared term in education in recent times. It is essentially concerned with the idea that those entrusted with responsibilities to fulfil certain tasks should explain what has been done and achieved (Lawton, 1980), including assuming ownership of failures. Following the increased marketisation practices in the public sphere, including that of education, devolution and decentralisation (Whitty, et. al, 1998, Karlsen, 2000) as new ‘regimes’ of governance in education has placed greater public accountability on schools. In fact, Ranson (2003: 459) argued that “accountability is no longer merely an important instrument or component within the system, but constitutes the system itself.” This is also reflected in Ball’s (2001, quoted in Ranson, 2003: 459) assertion that we are living in a “performative society”. All forms of accountability are political as “one level in a hierarchical system is subject to scrutiny by a different level” (Lawton, 1980: 11).

All these translates into teachers needing to ‘explain’ any forms of non-performance (especially in the overall Mean Subject Grade or MSG of IH) to the school administration so that the latter can in turn justify themselves to the various stakeholders in the school (for example the BOG and parents). This emphasizes what Ranson (2003: 461) terms “discursive relations of accountability”. If not checked, in the long run it may cause the assessment on quality of the system to shift towards that of evaluating system efficiency (Elliot, 2001, quoted in Ranson, 2003), which counters the goals of the IH programme and IP in general. At the local level, it can also result in a reversal to the teacher-centred pedagogy typically practiced in an educational setting that prepares students for crucial one-time national examinations like the GCE ‘O’ and “A” evel examinations:

“Sometimes I find myself going back to taking control of the learning process in class, drilling them (students) and ensuring that they can answer test questions. I feel that the focus is still on meeting certain MSG targets.”

(Personal Interview, 25 April 2006, Teacher B)

One teacher also remarked that the school management had deliberately adjusted academic standards over the course of the implementation of the curriculum so that the overall performance of students remained “acceptable”. This suggested that the management functioned like a system-wide mechanism that had the ability to influence the outcome of policy process, interpreting policy not as naïve readers, but with personal histories, experiences, values and purposes (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992). Other than the management, the practice of documentation became an additional way of influencing policy outcome. Due to the fact that traditional assessment modes like class tests are not able to capture and measure educational outcomes in IP adequately, a reliance on documentation data like entries in teachers’ record book which feature lesson plans and teaching resources, as well as periodic student file checks became the next recourse to ascertain the attainment of objectives of the IH curriculum as described in the IH Concept Paper.

Another effect of teachers’ increased accountability for results could be increased cynicism and teacher resistance towards new initiatives and programmes if it means a

possible compromise in the absolute performance of students in terms of MSG, as students adjust to such changes. This is over and above the increased levels of stress experienced by teachers (which in part may be attributed to the need to cope with change and the uncertainty it brings) with the notion of increased accountability in one's work.

6.4 Motivational Levels

6.4.1 Teachers' Motivational Levels

As discussed in Section 5.1, the new IH curriculum precipitated a shift from teacher-centred, product-oriented processes to student-centred, process-oriented processes. This has increased teachers' motivational levels to a certain extent as the previous restrictions of teaching under an examination-based system have been somewhat removed, save from the issue of increased accountability of their students' academic performance.

Resultantly, the teachers interviewed all expressed a renewed sense of calling and enthusiasm in their work, pleased with the opportunity to now better reconcile their educational ideals with their practices. This translates into a generally positive and engaging classroom experience for themselves as well as their students, evinced by the two classroom observations conducted in this study, where the teachers exhibited a great amount of passion and conviction in their lesson delivery. There was also a deliberate attempt by both teachers to incorporate student-focused activities like group discussion and sharing with other students in the class. The teachers' role had been changed to more of a facilitator than an instructor in the classroom. This has important implications in constructing the appropriate type of classroom ecology that will maximise the nature of learning via teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships.

Increased motivational levels amongst teachers can have a positive effect on intended policy outcomes as they, being the direct executors of the policy can help shape processes to achieve the "desired" objectives, making implementation more effective. However, it must be cautioned that motivational levels will not always be high as factors like stress, unhappiness and latent resentment over perceived injustices can result in low morale amongst teachers.

6.4.2 Students' Motivational Levels

Like the their teachers, the students interviewed and observed in classrooms showed a high level of motivation in their learning process. It was clear that students preferred and appreciated the expanded opportunities to pursue their respective interests in varied forms, be it through academic or non-academic competitions, research projects or class presentations:

"Research-based learning allows us to determine our learning process. There is a certain thrill and desire to do well in research... it makes learning fun."

(Focus Group Interview, 4 May 2006, Group D)

Students generally felt included in the education process as what is taught in classrooms is no longer solely dictated by the national syllabi and that their feedback (especially on academic matters) is taken seriously. Hence it lessened their feelings of being consistently made to bear the brunt of macro-level decisions, while foregrounding their centrality in the policy process.

7 Conclusion

Policy analyses not only reveal underlying politics at play in the production of policies, but also examine the effects of their implementation, with the aim of improving processes and practices. This chapter will draw the study to a close by focusing on the way forward, following the implementation of the revamped IH curriculum through the IH policy text (IH Concept Paper) of Excel Institution.

7.1 The Way Forward

7.1.1 Maintaining Best Practices

7.1.1.1 Humanities Research Paper

Undoubtedly, the replacement of traditional examinations with the Humanities Research Paper (HRP) was very well received by both teachers and students in the school. As two groups of student respondents reflected:

“The HRP allowed us to focus on our interest areas, so we can further develop our areas of interest and potentially do well for it.”

(Focus Group Interview, 4 May 2006, Group D)

“HRP is based on our own ideas and it is a lot of independent work. It allows a lot of space for us to explore topics, so the knowledge that is produced is more long-lasting.”

(Focus Group Interview, 17 April 2006, Group C)

It was clear from the responses gathered that the HRP developed a set of skills that were not traditionally covered, or at least difficult to do so in an examination system. These included critical and creative thinking skills, syntheses and evaluation of information, and the creation of new knowledge that advances the conceptual development and frameworks in particular subject domains. Additionally, the HRP forces consistent work to be done over a sustained period of time in order to do well. Hence, it helped to develop students' sense of tenacity, independence and strong task commitment levels, traits which will ultimately stand them in good stead in a “real world” context. This was the common response given by the teachers interviewed and they all expressed the wish that the HRP be kept as a distinguishing element in the IH curriculum.

Since its pilot in 2003 with a select group of students, the HRP had been through three cycles of implementation. It was decided by the senior management of the school at the end of 2005, that HRP be limited to students in the upper secondary levels from 2006 onwards (that is, those in Years 3 and 4 of IP). This was a result of a review of the effectiveness of this mode of assessment, where it became evident that perhaps the lower secondary students (Years 1 and 2 of IP) did not have the intellectual maturity and vocabulary, much less skills to tackle a research paper.

In retaining HRP in the curriculum, all the teachers interviewed agreed that research (in any subject area) may not be suitable for every student as it calls for a different set of skills which some students may not be ready to adopt or be adept at this stage. Hence, it has been recommended that although HRP is a good assessment alternative to examinations, perhaps the number of HRP students can be further narrowed to those who have a ‘genuine’ passion and desire to conduct research in the Humanities. However, the issue of accurately identifying these students remains a thorny issue. One teacher suggested offering HRP only

to students in the Humanities Programme (HP), whom by virtue of their enrolment in HP technically attests to their passion and drive to excel in the Humanities, hence their suitability for HRP. On the other hand, this practice might raise issues of inequality and unfairness in terms of the provision of equal opportunities for all students.

7.1.1.2 From a Teacher-Centred to Student – Centred Pedagogy

Apart from de-emphasising terminal examinations as the main mode of assessment, the shift from a largely teacher - centred to student - centred classroom pedagogy was another element in the IH curriculum that was welcomed by teachers and students alike. Although Excel Institution had always prided itself for adopting a student-centred approach in teaching and learning even before IP, the need to fulfil a national curriculum that was geared towards the GCE 'O' levels examination meant that there was limited scope in allowing students to take charge of their learning process. To a certain extent, teachers were also unwilling to do so for fear of not preparing students adequately, especially those in the upper secondary levels in examination skills to do well.

The adoption of the IP model of education in the school has allowed teachers and students to throw away the shackles of being bound by a prescribed, restricted national curriculum and engage in more exploratory and experimental works in the classroom. A common theme that emerged from the students interviewed was that of increased interactivity between teachers and students and amongst students in the classroom. This was facilitated through more student-focused activities like oral presentations, group discussions and group projects that allowed students the time and space to assimilate and reflect on the content taught in class.

7.1.1.3 Contextualisation of Learning

One of the general objectives of the IH curriculum is to “equip students with the ability to apply what they learn in meaningful and real world contexts” (Ng, 2003: 5). This has been realised, judging by the feedback provided by teachers and students. Both groups felt that a greater level of authenticity had been achieved in the learning process, based on the thematic approach in curriculum delivery as suggested by the IH Concept Paper. This approach has resulted in students being better able to appreciate the relevance of what is taught in their classrooms, as real world examples had been deliberately incorporated into the design of syllabi for the various Humanities subjects.

“The IH core doesn't just teach us skills and content, but what we learn is actually current affairs as well, like globalisation, terrorism, economic development of Singapore etc. I find it quite useful and interesting in terms of the knowledge learnt.”

(Focus Group Interview, 6 April 2006, Group A)

It is in this area that the PC (Humanities) felt had exceeded the expectations laid out by MOE to IP schools – in closing the gap between what is happening in the world and what is taught in classrooms.

Regular seminar series like the Humanities Lecture series where academics were invited to give talks to students on issues and subject matter that are of significance in current research trends was another attempt to lend authenticity and relevance to the curriculum. This went down well with the students interviewed who viewed such efforts as enriching the curriculum:

“The seminars that have been organised allow us to learn from well-known speakers because it provides opportunities for students to question them (the speakers) and learn from them.”

(Focus Group Interview, 4 May 2006, Group D)

The emphasis on authenticity and application of knowledge resonates with Gestalt psychologists’ understanding of human learning: “We respond to meanings, we make intellectual connections” (Phillips & Soltis, 1985: 36). Human beings experience the world in meaningful patterns. As such, learning takes place only if insight is obtained (Phillips & Soltis, 1985) and this “insight” may be obtained through seeing the relevance of what one is learning in class. Thus, it is imperative that this mode of learning in the Humanities classroom be maintained and perpetuated.

7.1.2 Issues to Consider

7.1.2.1 Assessment

The most contentious aspect of the IH policy outcome is in the area of student assessment. Much had been debated over teacher-accountability of students’ results and the spirit with which some of the assessment methods had been adopted. As discussed in Section 6.3, teachers in the Humanities department generally experienced a high level of stress under the new IH curriculum as they are made to feel responsible for their students’ performances in tests and examinations. This has resulted in a dialectic between preparing students well for the traditional pencil and paper tests and weaning them off the same skills that are deemed to have little real world applications and value.

Teacher-accountability also extended beyond students’ grades to include being answerable to students’ attitude and commitment in ACE and HRP, yet another source of duress for teachers. While teacher-supervision in these tasks is essential and unequivocally agreed on by teachers, what riled them was the transference of ownership in these tasks from students to teachers when the latter were asked to justify poor results obtained in those fields. This seemed to run contrary to the spirit and original intent of instituting assessment modes like ACE and HRP into the curriculum – to inculcate independent, self-directed learning, thereby enabling students to assume responsibility in their learning process. Such aims will not be accomplished if ACE and HRP became teacher-directed, as opposed to teacher-facilitated. There needs to be a move away from primarily using grades (although they are the most convenient measures) to justify learning and success of policy implementation.

At the other end of the spectrum, three groups of students interviewed expressed the opinion that there seemed to be too much reliance on tests to measure learning. They remarked that tests tended to be too ambitious in covering content and skills and suggested that class tests cover only a few ‘important’ concepts and skills, with the rest assessed through other means like assignments or projects.

While it is understandable that the school administrators remain chiefly accountable for the success of its programmes to its stakeholders, and that social justice should prevail in terms of policy effects, it is vital that in the course of policy implementation, knee-jerk responses to problems encountered is minimised.

“The attitude towards assessment must change. There must be more tolerance for failure, which I feel is inevitable given that the system is new and is still finding its footing. We cannot keep changing the system whenever we don’t achieve the desired outcomes.”

(Personal Interview, 25 April 2006, Teacher B)

“There tends to be a knee-jerk reaction towards students’ non-performance in tests. I think the management ought to take into account that with more thinking skills infused into the curriculum and as it finds its way into our assessments, naturally the students may not do as well as before IP. We are all still adjusting... the context for poor performance must be understood.”

(Personal Interview, 2 May 2006, Teacher C)

If policies are subject to constant modifications *before* the modified system is allowed to settle, the integrity and effectiveness of its intents may be compromised. Perhaps it may be more appropriate to make aggregate changes rather than interim ones. More time needs to be given for a change in mindset to occur, so that students and teachers alike can successfully adapt to the new system and philosophy of education that values knowledge creation over mere acquisition.

7.1.2.2 Issue of Time – Are We Doing Too Much?

A perennial issue that emerged during the interviews with teachers and students was the lack of time, both within and outside curriculum hours. Teachers often lamented the lack of time to pursue enrichment topics in-depth with their students within curriculum hours, or to conduct enrichment activities like field studies outside curriculum hours (save for school holidays or weekends). The former was attributed to the need to devote time to prepare students for class tests and examinations, while the latter was a result of students’ very heavy commitments in their Co-Curricular Activities and other academic programmes. Likewise, students reflected that they were often swamped with homework, preparation for tests, school activities and multiple project work to really devote the necessary time and energy to do well in IH ACE and HRP.

It might be useful to bear in mind that the extra time freed from not sitting for a terminal national examination should not be misconstrued as an opportunity to increase the quantity of work and programmes for teachers and students. Instead, what is more crucial and no doubt challenging is streamlining and developing quality programmes that develop the potential of students, without over exhausting them and teachers in the process.

7.1.2.3 Students as the Focus of Policy

In curriculum revision of such magnitude, it is imperative that the interests of various stakeholders be taken into consideration (as had been the case in the development of the IH curriculum), in order that the final policy is fair in its representation of the stakeholders’ interests. However, caution needs to be exercised in not privileging one group over another. Decisions made have to be in the interests of the students, considering that education may be considered a ‘public good’, notwithstanding the problematization by Bottery (2000) on whether education possessed the necessary attributes to be classed as one. Insofar as achieving social democracy is concerned, the educational maxim in Singapore provides this

by stipulating that every child will have equal opportunities in education. Thus, education may be considered a ‘public good’ in Singapore, which therefore necessitates a focus on the impact(s) on the learners owing to any policy changes or formulation.

7.2 Conclusion

This study was undertaken to analyse HCI’s (High School Section) IH Concept Paper, prepared as part of the school-wide introduction of IP, as a policy text. Through analyses of the context of production, processes and effects, it became clear that the policy process was political, contested and value-laden and the policy text a discourse.

While the development of the IH curriculum and framework was located within MOE’s wider IP policy of providing a more diverse and challenging learning context for high-ability students, the agencies of teachers and students were reflected in the course of policy text production and practice – the former in their design of academic modules where they had the autonomy to decide on the subject matter to be written, while the latter in providing feedback to the school administration regarding issues that emerged from implementation. At the same time, the interests of various stakeholders like the BOGs and college humanities tutors had to be satisfied in the policy process. What resulted was the production of a material-procedural policy text that was interpreted by teachers in the humanities department as an instructional text, informing them of the means of execution.

The effects of this policy were mixed, with teachers acknowledging that it provided more opportunities for expanded cross-curricular studies and applauding the effort to greater synthesize the study of humanities beyond arbitrary domain boundaries, a view shared by students as well. There was also a shift to a more student-centred approach in the teaching and learning of the Humanities, coupled with increased choices for students to pursue subject matter that interested them in the form of electives. This had direct positive impacts on students’ motivational levels in the classroom, which in turn had a positive spin-off effect on teachers as well. However, there were also concerns related to teacher and student readiness in a new paradigm of education, teacher-accountability in the attitude and performance of students, as well as teachers’ and students’ workload.

One of the implications of such a policy process is that it exhibited the agility of the school to fine-tune its existing programmes and align its mission to wider national educational reforms. While doing so, it must bear in mind the duress that might be experienced by teachers in the school who will be the main apparatus of change, given that they are the ones tasked to implement changes. Measures must be in place to ensure that teachers are not burnt-out at the end of the day from having to cope with changes and the problems that may arise from them. The same can be said for students. This is essential not only from a welfare point of view but also from that of school management and leadership, in not creating a culture of resistance towards change, owing to the inability to cope. It is also crucial that no interests of any group be privileged in the policy process, for this will lead to social injustice in the allocation of resources.

No matter what the varied outcomes may be in the implementation of the IH programme, one definite consequence that can be observed and agreed by all is the reconfiguration of the traditional conception of education that emphasises “initiation into sacred bodies of knowledge” (Whitty and Power, 2002: 98). The teacher-student nexus has been reconstituted to that of a “relationship between producer and consumer where knowledge... is exchanged on the basis of the value it has to the consumer” (Whitty and Power, 2002: 99), with the

teacher and student assuming the interchangeable roles of producers and consumers of knowledge in different contexts. It is perhaps in this fluid production and exchange of knowledge that will best characterise and inform educational practices in the 21st century and HCI with its latest school reform effort will be poised to be the best practitioner in this field in Singapore.

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Appendix 1

Definition of streams at the secondary level:

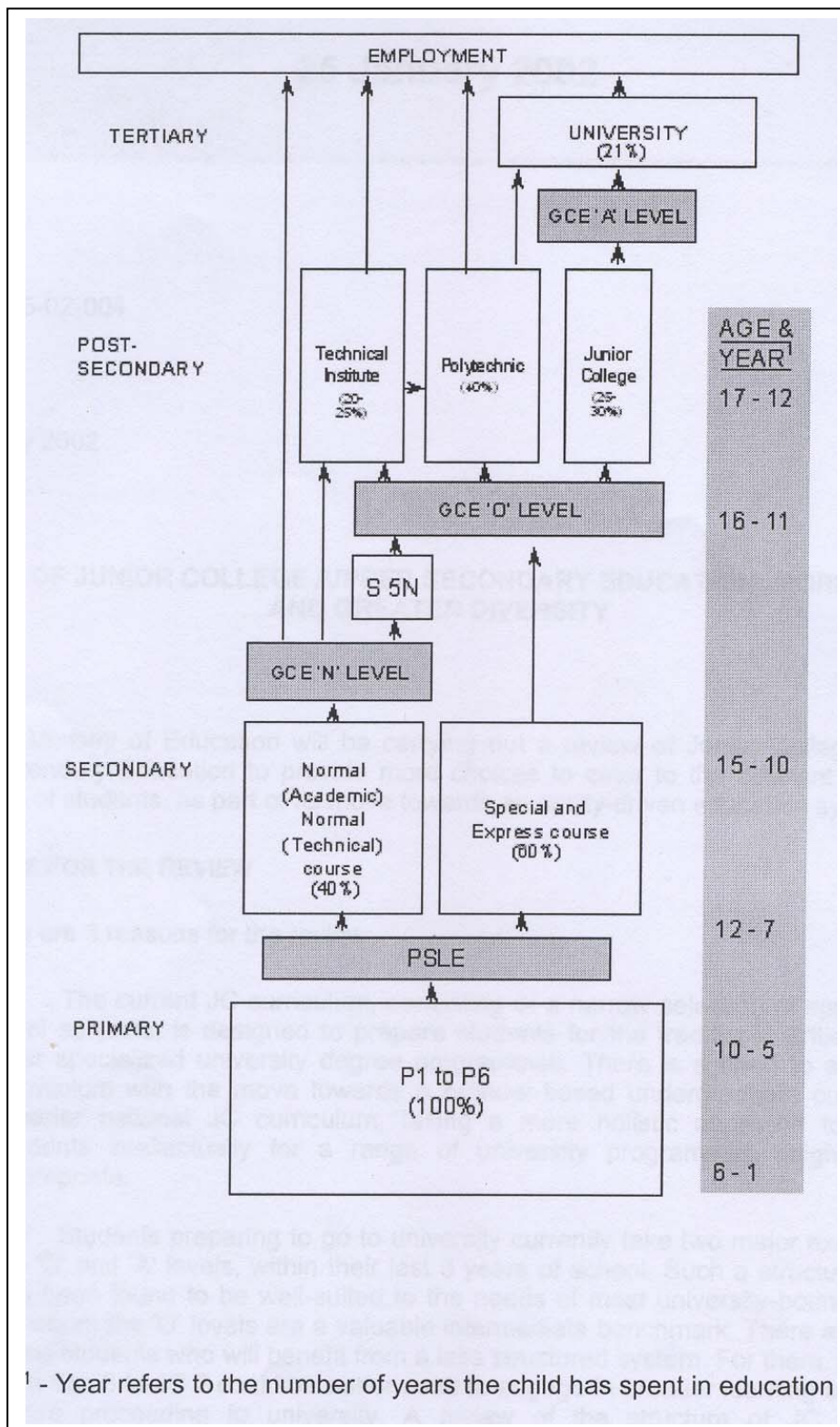
1. Special: Students take English Language and their Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) at first language level. They sit for the GCE 'O' Level examinations after four years.

2. Express: Students take English Language at the first language level and their Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) at second language level. They sit for the GCE 'O' Level examinations after four years.

3. Normal (Academic): Students take English Language at the first language level and their Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) at second language level. They sit for the GCE 'O' Level examinations after five years.

4. Normal (Technical): Students take English Language and their Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) at a basic level, with an emphasis on oral communications. They sit for the GCE 'N' (Technical) Level examinations at the end of their fourth. Those who meet the stringent criteria set by MOE may proceed to sit for the GCE 'O' Level examinations at the end of Secondary Five. This stream was designed for the academically less abled and so far, no one has made it to Secondary Five level.

Appendix 2



Structure of the Singapore education system prior to the introduction of IP

Figure 1

Appendix 3A**Interview Questions for Teachers****A) Structured Questions:**

1. What was your role in the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum in the Integrated Programme?
 - 1a. Describe the nature of your role.
 - 1b. How extensive was your involvement in the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum?
 - 1c. How much autonomy were you given in the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum?
 - 1d. Who were your intended audience in the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum?
2. Can you explain the rationale behind the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum?
3. Are you able to describe the objectives behind the IH curriculum as laid out in the IH Concept Paper?
 - 3a. If Yes, can you briefly describe them?
 - 3b. If No, can you explain why you can't?
4. Do you think the objectives laid out in the concept paper have been realized?
 - 4a. If Yes, to what extent and explain.
 - 4b. If no, why not?

B) Semi-structured Questions:

1. Describe your experiences in the implementation of the IH curriculum in the following areas:
 - Process (including teachers' and students' perception and attitudes towards the Humanities in school)
 - Outcome
 - Assessment
 2. Differences and similarities of experiences between pre-IP and IP days:
 - Process (including teachers' and students' perception and attitudes towards the Humanities in school)
 - Outcome
 - Assessment
 3. Discuss any areas of the IH curriculum that you would like to see:
-

- Retained and why?
- Changed and why?

Appendix 3B

Interview Questions for Author of IH Concept Paper

1. What were the main reasons why the Humanities curriculum was (re)designed under the Integrated Programme?
2. How was it that you were assigned the role of authorship of the IH Concept Paper?
3. Were there others who participated in the formulation of the IH Concept Paper/contributed to the process?
 - 3a. If Yes, Who were they and why? What was the extent of their involvement?
 - 3b. If No, why?
4. Who were the intended audience when the concept paper was conceived?
5. Did you face any challenges while you were coming up with the concept paper? Elaborate.
6. How was the content and intent of the concept paper communicated to the teachers in the Humanities department?
 - 6a. What were their initial reactions?
 - 6b. Were teachers' input sought?
7. In your view, do you think the objectives laid out in the concept paper have been realized?
 - 7a. If Yes, to what extent and explain.
 - 7b. If no, why not?

Appendix 3C**Interview Questions for Students (focus grouped interviews)**

1. Describe to me some of your learning experiences in the Humanities:

- good
- bad
- unique points

2. Do you think you know what are some objectives that the Humanities curriculum aims to achieve in the school?

3. What do you think are some of the salient qualities/defining characteristics of the way the Humanities subjects are taught in this school?

4. Are there any elements in the Humanities curriculum that you would like to see retained and/or changed?

- teaching and learning
- assessment

Appendix 3D**Interview Schedule**

Respondent	Date of Interview	Location
Teachers		
Teacher A	20 April 2006	Counselling Room
Teacher B	25 April 2006	Counselling Room
Teacher C	2 May 2006	Counselling Room
Author of IH Concept Paper	4 May 2006	Work Cubicle
Students		
Focus Group A	6 April 2006	Career Guidance Room
Focus Group B	11 April 2006	Career Guidance Room
Focus Group C	17 April 2006	Career Guidance Room
Focus Group D	4 May 2006	Career Guidance Room

Appendix 4A**Letter of Consent for Interview (Teachers)**

Dear colleague,

As part of my studies for a Master of Education (MEd) degree with The University of Western Australia (UWA), I am embarking on a research study in the area of policy analysis. The focus of this study is on the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum in this institution, guided by the Integrated Humanities (IH) Concept Paper produced in 2003 under the framework provided by the Institution's Integrated Programme.

The objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, it is to uncover the forces at work and to understand the processes related to the formulation of the IH Concept Paper. Secondly, the study aims to evaluate the extent of attainment of the objectives laid out in the concept paper in the areas of curriculum change and implementation.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study as an interview respondent. Details regarding the interview will be communicated to you on a separate occasion should you agree to be a participant.

Please contact me at melvin@hc.edu.sg with your decision.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request and I look forward to a favourable response from you.

Regards,

Chng Eng Hee Melvin
UWA MEd Research Student

Appendix 4B**Letter of Consent for Interview (Students)**

Dear student,

As part of my studies for a Master of Education (MEd) degree with The University of Western Australia (UWA), I am embarking on a research study in the area of policy analysis. The focus of this study is on the (re)design of the Humanities curriculum in this institution, guided by the Integrated Humanities (IH) Concept Paper produced in 2003 under the framework provided by the Institution's Integrated Programme.

The objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, it is to uncover the forces at work and to understand the processes related to the formulation of the IH Concept Paper. Secondly, the study aims to evaluate the extent of attainment of the objectives laid out in the concept paper in the areas of curriculum change and implementation.

I would like to hear from you your views about the IH curriculum, so that I may fulfil the second objective as stated in the previous paragraph.

As such, I would like to invite you to participate in this study as a respondent in a focus group interview. Details regarding the interview will be communicated to you on a separate occasion should you agree to be a participant.

Please contact me at melvin@hc.edu.sg with your decision.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request and I look forward to a favourable response from you.

Regards,

Mr Chng Eng Hee Melvin
UWA MEd Research Student