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Experience Future Career: The Paradigm of Applied Learning Curriculum in Hong Kong Secondary School

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Abstract

Applied learning implies an educational philosophy and learning method in which students master skills, practice theories, and operate models through usage. In the context of the new academic structure in Hong Kong, applied learning courses are elective courses for secondary schools committed to reshaping vocational-oriented education. After 20 years of development, applied learning curriculums in Hong Kong senior secondary schools have a complete operational framework, which reflects the essence of the diversified integration and multi-pathway. This paper aims to draw a broad picture of vocational education in secondary schools through applied learning. Applied learning paradigm in Hong Kong achieves parallel connectivity between vocational education and general academic education and can be regarded as an effective model for promoting the coordinated development of vocational education and general education in secondary school. Provide a reference for the trial promotion of vocational-oriented education in mainland China's general high schools. The coexistence of mixed vocational education in comprehensive high schools is a significant feature of the applied learning curriculum, which is conducive to improving the current situation of separation between general high schools and secondary vocational schools in mainland China. Applied learning curriculums could enrich the connotation of recent high school career education and promote the integration of vocational education and general education in the secondary education stage.

Keywords: Applied Learning, Curriculum Paradigm, High School, Vocational Education, Hong Kong, Mainland China

1. Introduction

1.1 Concept and Definition

Applied learning is a kind of educational concept and learning model students learn by applying skills and theories. Students apply the knowledge and skills acquired from traditional classroom learning and put them into practice. Based on real-world environments, conduct field research, observe the workplace, expand professional views, and gain direct experience. Varied from pre-service training, applied learning can either occur outside the traditional classroom or be integrated into the curriculum (SUNY, 2023).

1.2 Applied Learning Theories

Theoretical-based applied learning refers to the concept that students rely on in their applied learning practice, with students centered supports of switching places for classroom, laboratory, and off-campus learning, and learning through practice (Figure 1).

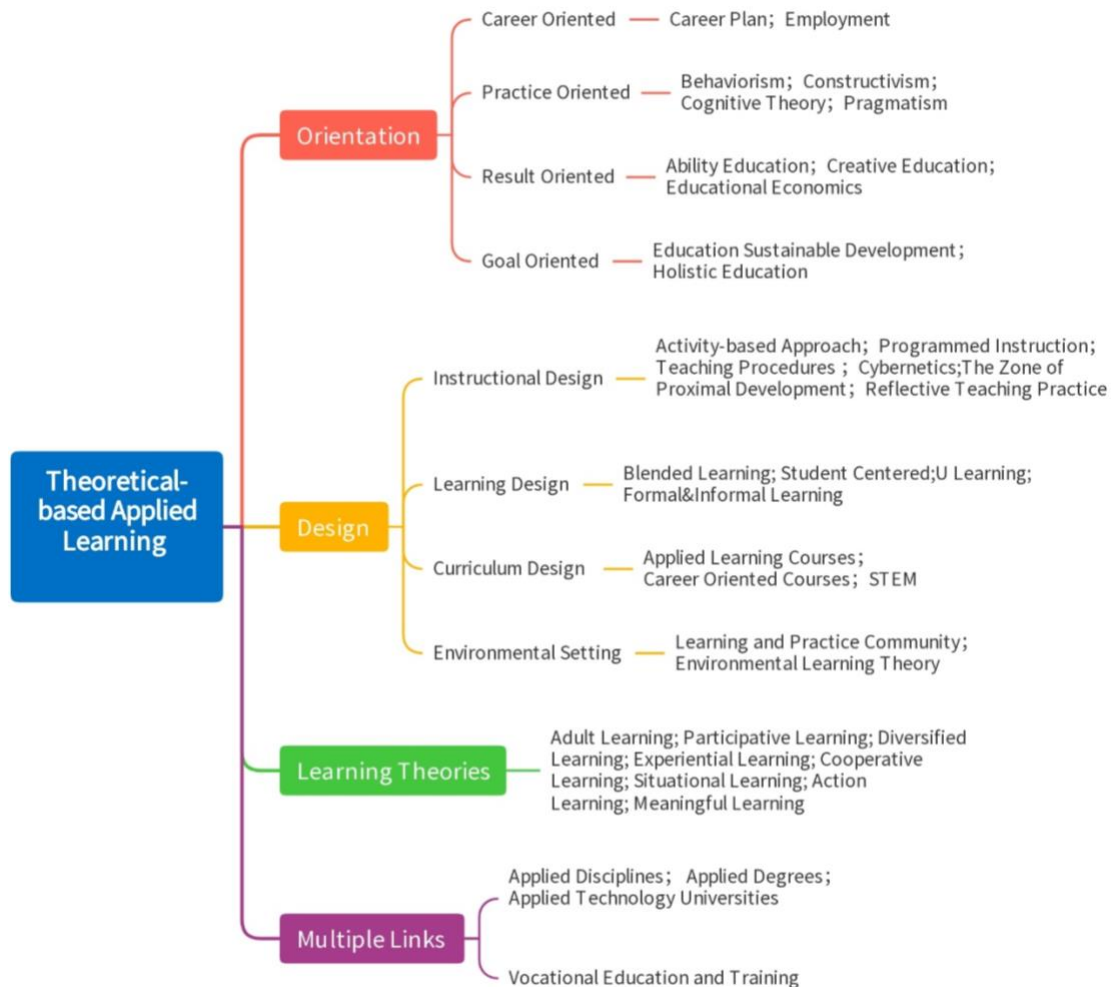


Figure 1: Theoretical-based Applied Learning

1.3 General Models of Applied Learning

The Data Dictionary provided by the State University of New York Institutional Research Information System (SIRIS) summarizes the empirical definitions and manifestations of applied learning in the higher educational stage (SIRIS, 2023) (Figure 2).

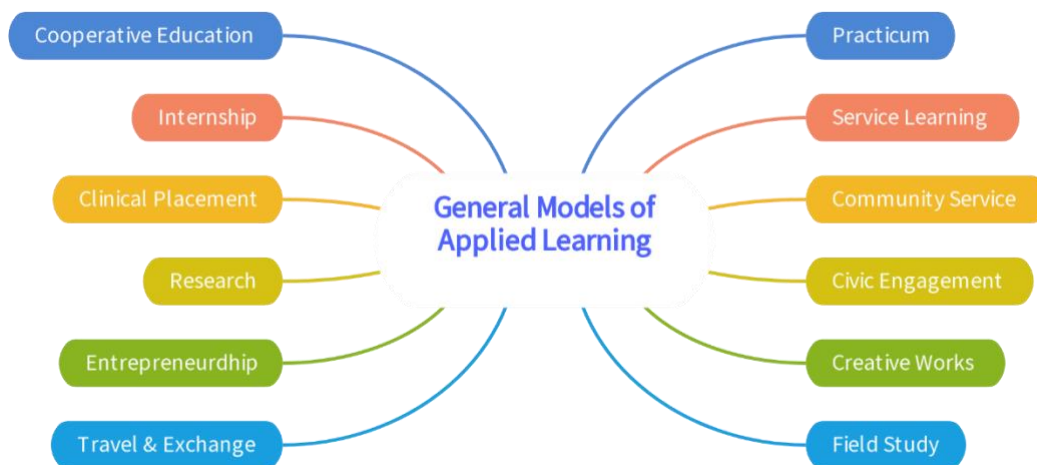


Figure 2: General Models of Applied Learning

The general mode of applied learning is also applicable to secondary schools. Thus, applied learning can also extensively dabble in the cross fields of academic and career goals, mainly reflected in the alternation of applied learning courses and academic courses in daily school contexts (SIRIS, 2023).

In Hong Kong, during the junior high school stage, comprehensive learning activities can broaden the horizons of junior high school students and help them gradually acquire career-related experiences. Students have opportunities to participate in vocational courses, lectures, workshops, training, and camps organized by commercial institutions and NGOs, visit workplaces, and conduct on-site inspections. Junior high school students can imagine future job assignments, understand the labor market early and consider employment opportunities.

In high school, diverse learning opportunities such as applied learning courses and other learning activities provide students with work-related visits and vocational perception. Applied learning courses focus on practical elements and complement the core course. Related to a wide range of majors and professional fields, applied learning courses could provide students with ample learning opportunities and attract many students to choose from. Nowadays, applied learning courses have played as elective subjects of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) ever since 2018.

2. Applied Learning in Hong Kong Since 1970s

2.1 Reshape Vacation-Oriented Education

Vocational education aims to cultivate students' specialized knowledge and skills and prepare them for professions and specific industries. Therefore, vocational education plays an indispensable part in the knowledge economy society. Between the 1960s and 1970s, vocational education was one of the common choices for young adolescents to pursue higher education in Hong Kong. With the implementation of compulsory education by the Hong Kong government in 1978, the traditional conception and the Chinese Proverb of "all things were inferior, but only educating is superior" (wan ban Jie Xia pin, wei you du shu gao) has generated a prejudice that vocational education was inferior to liberal arts and general higher education. Vocational training was considered to negatively impact a person's development and less likely to create a new middle class. These led to mainstream academic education inappropriately becoming the only social status' rising channel. However, vocational education and training were indispensable roles in the education system, promoting the integration of school education with work and providing flexible and diverse solutions for middle school students and professionals (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2020).

Since 2000, the Hong Kong government has been increasing opportunities for post-secondary education year by year, providing free education for all students up to the sixth grade of secondary school (Education Commission, 2000). The local education system needed to cultivate students' application skills that integrated different

knowledge, techniques, values, and attitudes. It was imperative to change the public's contempt for vocational education (Curriculum Development Council, 2000). The report "Learning to Learn" (Curriculum Development Council, 2001) announced a large-scale K-12 curriculum reform. Because of these, in 2003, the vocational-oriented education curriculum plan was first carried out and enriched vocational education. The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong (2005) charted the future direction of the high school curriculum. 2006 the Preparatory Committee for Vocational Oriented Education was established, and the report "Driving the Future - New High School System for Vocational Oriented Education and Special Schools" was released. In 2009, Hong Kong carried on a new school system, and the former career-oriented education curriculum was renamed an applied learning curriculum, becoming an elective course for senior high schools, according to Applied Learning Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Senior Secondary Level) (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). Applied Learning Group designed a handbook of High School Applied Learning Curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2010) and introduced details. Applied Learning Chinese Course was launched in 2014 for non-Chinese language students (Curriculum Development Council, 2014).

Ever since the school year of 2018, applied courses have been listed as elective subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE). The final Report of the Task Force on School Curriculum Review (September 2020) covered High School Applied Learning situations and called for attention to common questions. 2020 Policy Address highlighted the Promotion of Applied Learning Courses (Government of HKSAR, 2020).

The 2021 Policy Address viewed applied learning as a multi-path for further study or work. As the 2022 Policy Address advocated, the Applied Education Diploma (DAE) would be launched in 2023 (Government of HKSAR, 2022). Now, the Education in Hong Kong Bureau has released the FAQ of Applied Learning on its official website, and this September, high school students will apply for the DAE program. The Education Grants Committee of the University of Hong Kong states the recognition level of applied learning in undergraduate degree programs funded by universities.

2.2 High Frequency Words and Phrases of the Hong Kong Government's Policy Addresses

With the vigorous development of vocational guidance to education, "vocational education," "professional education," "vocational education," "youth development," "multiple paths," and "applied learning" have gradually become high frequency words in previous Hong Kong government policy reports. The Hong Kong government attaches great importance to promoting the prosperity of vocational education.

In the 2004 Policy Address, the Hong Kong government announced the progress of establishing the Qualifications Framework, officially implemented in 2008 (HKG, 2004). Implement vocational education and employment support programs in the form of pilots, provide regular funding to the Vocational Training Council, and support long-term development of vocational education, as the 2014 Policy Address mentioned (Government of HKSAR, 2014). To establish a work team for the promotion of vocational education, responsible for promoting vocational education, providing advice and suggestions, expanding the awareness of vocational education, and affirming the value of vocational education (Government of HKSAR, 2014).

In 2015, the Chief Executive stated in the Policy Address: "Sufficient and high-quality human resources are the primary condition for the sustainable development of Hong Kong's society and economy." To cultivate local talents and cope with the new challenges brought about by the transformation of the demographic structure. Expect to create more diversified and promising employment opportunities for young generations and provide diverse learning, training, and development opportunities." Vocational education plays an essential role in nurturing local talents (Government of HKSAR, 2015).

The 2017 and 2018 Policy Addresses have set unique columns for "vocational professional education" and "secondary education" (Government of HKSAR, 2017; Government of HKSAR, 2018). Analyzed by the 2020 Policy Addresses, promoting applied learning courses, various subsidizing, enriching students' experience, and promoting diversified and comprehensive development, were all suggested (Government of HKSAR, 2020). The

2021 Policy Addresses elaborates on the future vocational and professional education construction plan, promotes applied learning as a valuable high school elective subject, and develops more diversified courses that keep pace with the times (Government of HKSAR, 2021). Emphasize practice and theory, consider students' interests, and expand multiple advanced paths for further education and employment.

The 2022 "For the Happiness of the Citizens and the Development of Hong Kong" Policy Address fully affirmed the empowerment significance of "vocational education" not inferior to "general secondary education," and vowed to promote vocational education with the strategy of "communication between vocational education and diversified development" (Government of HKSAR, 2022). Similar to traditional academic education, specialized education provides youth with diverse learning and employment opportunities (Table 1).

Table 1: Education/Vocational Education Hotspots in Previous Policy Addresses of the Government of HKSAR

Year	Chapter/ Column/Title	Keynotes
2004	※ Invest in education and keep pace with the times ※ Promote employment and training	※ Pay attention to the youth's continuous learning ※ Employment issues ※ Continue to develop post-secondary education ※ Construction of pathways for higher education ※ Formulation of qualifications framework(QF) ※ Drawing the learning map
2005	※ Education Development	※ Implement the New Academic Structure (NAS) ever since 2009
2006	※ Gifted Education	※ Multiple pathways ※ Continuous learning
2007	※ Education Reform	※ Since 2008, fully subsidized students to enrol in full-time sponsored courses provided by the Vocational Training Council to replace high school education.
2008	※ National Education	※ National Education
2009	※ Education Industry ※ Youth Development	※ E-Learning ※ Internationalization
2010	※ Investment in Education	※ Multiple learning pathways for higher education
2011	※ Expand Education	※ Multiple learning pathways for higher education ※ A youth college will be added to provide exceptional support for non-Chinese speaking students and students with special educational needs.
2013	※ Youth Development	※ Promote a diverse culture of excellence ※ Provide opportunities for further study and employment
2014	※ Connect vocational education with employment support	※ Emphasis on the importance of vocational education ※ Established a task force to promote vocational education ※ Career Pilot Program
2015	※ Cultivate local workforce	※ Provide diverse learning, training, and development opportunities ※ Career plan ※ Business-School cooperation plan
2016	※ Vocational and post-secondary education	※ Fully aided secondary schools provide Applied Learning courses ※ Extension of "Vocational Education and Employment Support Pilot Program ※ Reserve urban land for the construction of school buildings by the Vocational Training Council
2017	※ Post-secondary Education ※ Vocational and Professional Education ※ Youth Development	※ Allocate the land and build the school building by the Vocational Training Council
2018	※ Post-secondary Education ※ Vocational and Professional Education ※ Youth Development	※ Increase opportunities and funding
2019	※ Care for children	※ Allowance for study ※ Comprehensively increase the amount of working family allowance ※ Bailout
2020	※ Promote Applied Learning Courses	※ Promote Applied Learning as an elective subject in the senior high school ※ Support for diversified courses ※ Expand the field of study and experience
2021	※ Multiple advanced paths	※ Continue to promote applied learning ※ Expand further education and employment
2022	※ Vocational Education	※ Strengthen the junior high school students' applied learning and workplace experience. ※ Optimize the senior high school applied learning curriculum

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- ※ Vocational school connectivity and diversified development
 - ※ Expand the "Designated Professional/Sectoral Course Funding Scheme"
 - ※ First batch of pilot programs for launching applied degree courses
 - ※ Accelerate the development of the career qualification ladder
 - ※ Launch of Applied Education Diploma Courses
 - ※ Strengthen applied learning and workplace experience for the junior high school students
 - ※ Furtherly promote vocational education
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Compared with the previous policy addresses, the 2022 administrative report has an unprecedented length and plans in detail to promoting vocational education during the secondary stage which is treated as an essential part (Government of HKSAR,2022).

The rapid development of applied learning courses throughout secondary schools should positively fulfill market demands, attract industry participation, increase funding, and expand relevant courses in urgently needed professional/industry fields. Strengthen the junior high school students' applied learning and workplace experience. Applied learning courses complement other high school core courses and elective courses. Accept and approve applied learning courses, accelerate the development of the professional qualification framework, and launch the Diploma in Applied Education.

2.3 Curriculum Frame of Secondary Schools in Hong Kong

The New Academic Structure (NAS) has been implemented since 2009. Six years of free secondary school education are conducted to broaden and balance the 12-year compulsory education curriculum and provide diversified and specialized options to meet students' academic, professional, and career development needs. Based on the experience guiding students to plan for their future under the three-year junior and three-year senior high school curriculum, the education system must prepare students' life holistically in major domains such as work and learning during secondary years (Education Bureau, 2023). Cultivate students' independent ability for lifelong learning and promote all-around development. Secondary education in Hong Kong advocates seven learning objectives. Attach importance to connecting five essential learning experiences, intending to cultivate seven primary values and nine generic skills. Generic skills refer to the crucial ability of students to acquire applied knowledge and master skills in different situations. Through the learning of cross-subjects, the typical power cultivated can be transferred to other learning situations (Education Bureau, 2017).

Learning to Learn - 3+3 Academic Structure of Hong Kong Secondary School Curriculum

Vision:

7 learning goals--National and global citizenship, broad knowledge base, language skills, generic skills, information literacy, career planning, healthy lifestyle

Targets:

5 essential learning experiences--moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and artistic development, work-related experience

7 Overarching Values--Grit, Respect, Responsibility, National Identity, Commitment; Integrity, Caring

9 common Skills (basic skills 3 + thinking skills 3 + personal and social skills 3)

		Core subjects (4)	Electives (2)	Other Learning Experiences
Senior Secondary Schools	S6	*Chinese language *English language	* Electives Subjects under key Learning Areas *Applied Learning (S5-S6)	*Values Education *Aesthetic Education
	S5	*Mathematics *Citizenship and Social Development	Applied Learning Guidance Course (S4)	*Physical Development *Community Service
	S4		*Other Languages	*Career Related Experience
Junior Secondary Schools	S3	Major Renewed Emphases of Secondary School Curricula		
	S2	Chinese Language Education; English Language Education; Mathematics Education; Science Education; Technology Education; Personal, Social and Humanities Education; Arts Education; Physical Education		
	S1			

Figure 3: Learning to Learn - 3+3 Academic Structure of Hong Kong Secondary School Curriculum (Education Bureau, 2017)

Hong Kong high school students can choose 2 to 4 elective subjects, forming a flexible combination of course elections, including traditional elective subjects or up to two applied learning subjects. Students can also only study applied learning for up to two subjects. Applied learning courses are offered in the fifth and sixth year of the secondary school to give students ample time to participate in the pilot program during the fourth year and carefully consider which areas to pursue (Legislative Council Education Affairs Committee, 2015).

Applied learning course is one of the newly established elective subjects in the new senior high school curriculum and is hailed as one of the disciplines that best reflect the spirit of the new high school. Unlike other disciplines, applied learning courses aim not solely to advance to higher education but simultaneously to connect with the labor market. The establishment of applied learning is a positive response to the 2005 educational reform document "The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong," aiming to enable students to learn relevant knowledge from application and practice through real situations, thereby cultivating generic skills (Education and Manpower bureau, 2005). The 2009 Applied Learning Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Senior Secondary Level) was systematically discussed. Further standardized this, expanding the curriculum objectives of applied learning to help students explore and understand the orientation of employment and Lifelong learning, applied learning practices, the student-centered teaching model, experiential learning, and developing generic skills advocated in the 2005 educational reform documents, providing students with opportunities beyond mainstream education (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017).

The predecessor of applied learning was vocational-oriented education, where the learning content was related to a wide range of majors and professional fields to expand and deepen students' understanding of various industries. Students can choose according to their situation and master knowledge and skills through practical exercises. Through the course, students are able to understand the knowledge, skills, and workplace requirements within their professional fields, think about the direction of employment, and achieve the established goal of promoting vocational education through applied learning (Leung, 2013). That is to develop the learning path of vocational education, starting from applied learning and providing a Higher Diploma, which connects degree courses for further study.

Applied learning has six learning categories, targeting the labor market and covering various topics. Taking the 2023-2025 academic year as an example, students can choose up to two out of 58 applied learning courses, including two pilot Applied Learning courses, three Applied Learning (Vocational English) (ApL(VocE)) and three Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) (ApL(C)) courses. Most need 180 class hours per course (Table 2). Since 2014/2015, applied learning Chinese studies have been launched for non-Chinese language students (Applied Learning Section Curriculum Development Institute of Education Bureau, 2022).

Table 2: Prospectus for Applied Learning (2023-25)

Prospectus for Applied Learning (2023-25)				
Area of Studies	Course Cluster	Subject Amount	Course Example	Course Description
Creative Studies	Design Studies	3	1. Fashion Image Design	※180 class hours for each course ※The 5 th year and 6 th year of secondary school ※Select up to 2 courses ※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Media Arts	2	4. Computer Game and Animation Design	
	Performing Arts	2	7. Taking a Chance on Dance	
Media and Communication	Films, TV and Broadcasting Studies	2	9. Digital Media and Radio Production	※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Media Production and Public Relations	3	11. Digital Brand Communication	
	Language and Culture	9	14. Applied Learning (Vocational English) –English Communication	
Business, Management and Law	Accounting and Finance	1	23. Accounting for e-Business	※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Business Studies	4	24. AI in Business	
	Legal Studies	1	28. Law Enforcement in Hong Kong	
Services	Food Services and Management	3	29. Modern Southeast Asian Cuisine	※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Hospitality Services	3	32. Airport Passenger Terminal Operations	
	Personal and Community Services	3	35. Child Care and Development	
Applied Science	Food Science	1	38. Food Innovation and Science	※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Medical Science and Health Care	5	39. Animal Care	
	Psychology	2	44. Applied Psychology	
	Sports	2	46. Exercise and Fitness Coaching	
Engineering And Production	Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering	2	48. Digital Construction	※Recommend electing 1-2 courses
	Information Engineering	2	50. AI and Robotics	
	Information Engineering	2	52. eSports Technology	
	Services Engineering	2	54. Aviation Studies	

Applied Learning Chinese (For non-Chinese speaking students)	3	56. Chinese in Business Service	※Each course has 270 class hours ※Elect 1 course
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2.4 20 Years' Development of Applied Learning Curriculums in Secondary Schools (2003-2023)

In the 2003/2005 academic year, the Education in Hong Kong Bureau launched 12 vocational education-oriented pilot courses (application learning can be the predecessor of the course) for the first time, two partner program courses, and two course providers accepted more than 600 secondary school students from 60 schools. In the 2004/2006 academic year, these two institutions provided 32 courses to 130 schools with 2000 students. From 2007 to 2009, 13 institutions offered 31 applied learning courses attended by over 3000 students from 200 secondary schools. From 2014 to 2015, 10 institutions provided 36 applied learning courses, with over 10000 students from over 300 schools participating in course selection (Applied Learning Group, Curriculum Development Division, Education in Hong Kong Bureau, 2015). Twenty years after the launch of career-oriented courses, from 2023 to 2025, 10 institutions will provide a total of 58 applied learning courses for high school students in Hong Kong (Figure 4) (Applied Learning Section Curriculum Development Institute of Education Bureau,2022).

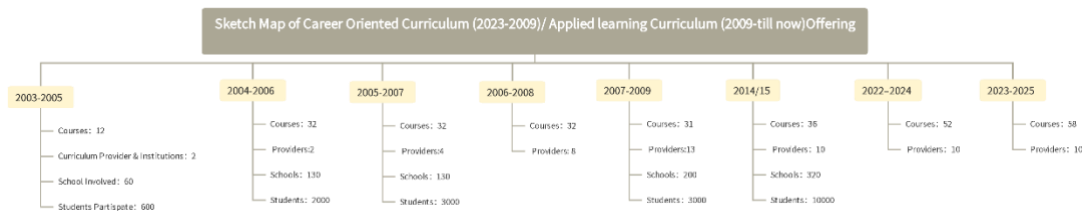


Figure 4: Sketch Map of Career Oriented Curriculum (2023-2009)/ Applied learning Curriculum (2009-till now) Offering

3. Panorama of Hong Kong Applied Learning Framework

The predecessor of applied learning was vocational-oriented education, piloted in 2003. In 2008, it was all named "applied learning curriculum." After 20 years of high-speed development, it formed a complete operating system that includes goal positioning, learning scope, quality assurance, recognition and evaluation, further education and employment, and diversified subsidies. It draws a broad picture of promoting vocational education in secondary schools through applied learning (Figure 5).

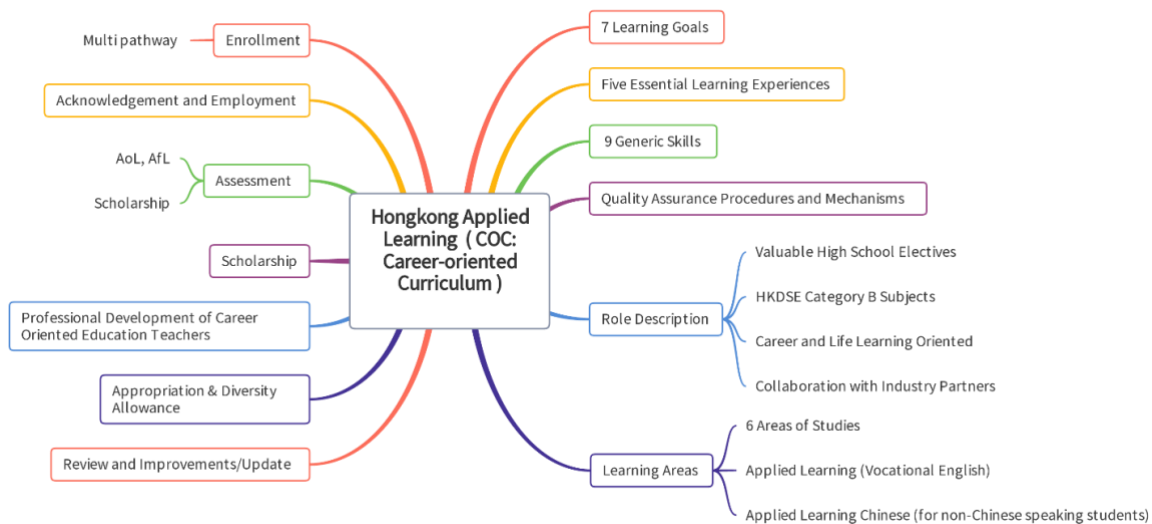


Figure 5: A Panorama of Applied Learning Research Framework in Hong Kong

4. Curriculum Design for Applied Learning

4.1 Curriculum Design Principles

Applied learning courses complement other high school courses, providing students with sufficient information to choose suitable high school elective subjects, gain opportunities to understand specific industries, pursue further education or employment, and engage in deep learning of real-life situations to achieve holistic development. The design principles of applied learning courses refer to (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017):

- As an emerging subject providing diverse learning pathways, applied learning courses are closely related to the social, cultural, and economic development of Hong Kong.
- Extend learning environment, providing teaching venues through universities and actual workplaces.
- Obtain initial experience in the workplace. Promote students learning through context and prepare them for their future after graduating from high school.
- Provide application and practical scenarios for learning, teaching, and evaluation purposes, supplemented by relevant knowledge.
- Recognize rich learning outcomes as part of the Hong Kong Secondary School Diploma.

The applied learning course is based on eight learning areas in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools, following four core principles (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017):

- Balance the needs of the workplace, school education, and personal needs.
- Coordinate the correlation between courses.
- Connect education and employment opportunities.
- Hold a global perspective while considering local characteristics and enriching students' vocational school learning experience.

4.2 Curriculum Design Framework

Applied learning adheres to the principle of learning in practice and adopts the FTPVC organizational framework to design courses because it is practical and applicable (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017) (Figure 6).

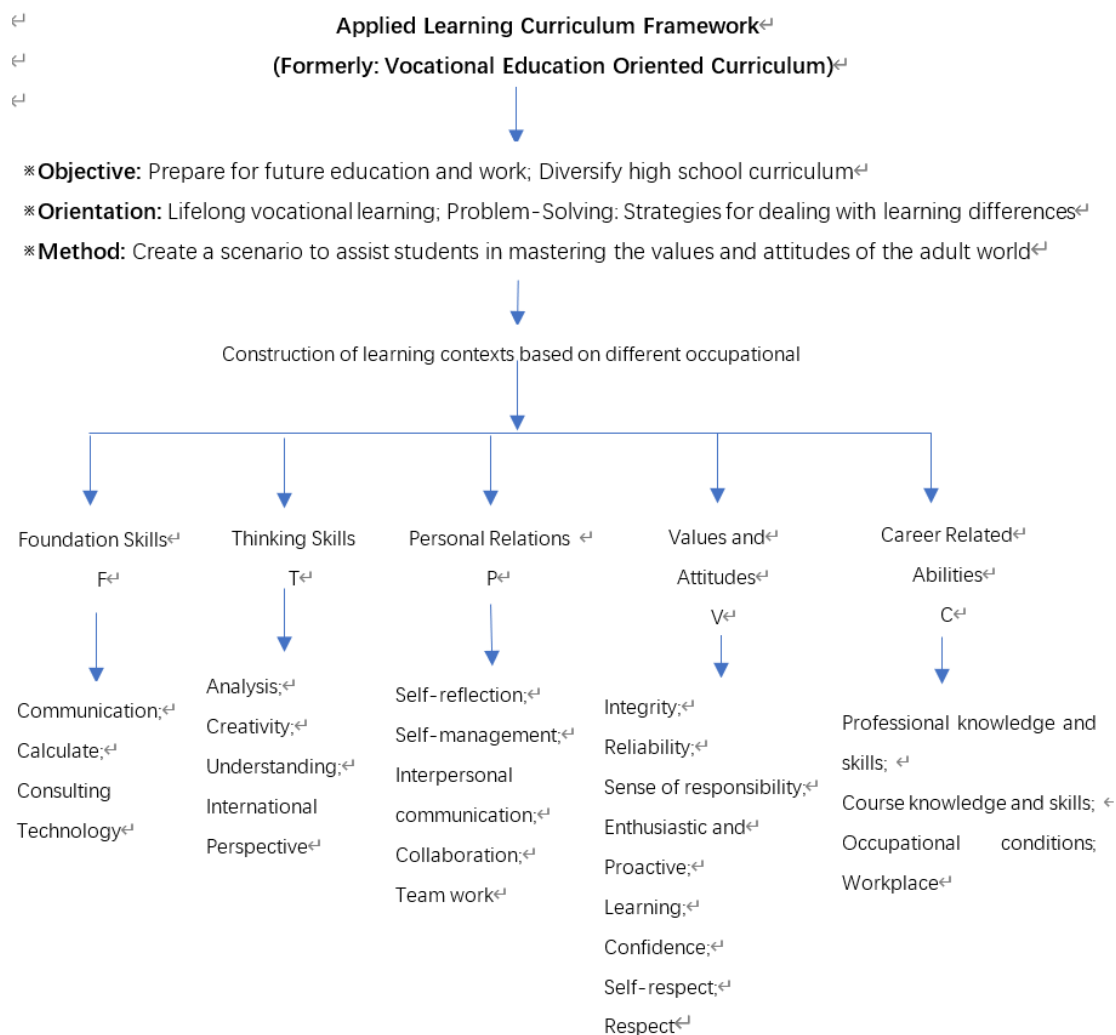


Figure 6: Applied Learning Course Architecture Diagram: Construction of Learning Situations Based on Different Occupational Areas

4.3 Applied Learning Course Evaluation

4.3.1. Evaluation classification

As far as applied learning is conducted, there are no paper-pencil examinations, and the evaluation focuses on collecting students' performance and evidence of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017). Then compare with preset standards and give a review. Assessment can be divided into two main parts: (1) assessment of learning - to facilitate student learning and monitor student progress, and (2) assessment for learning - to demonstrate the level achieved by students—the ability to transfer acquired skills to new situations.

Assessment of learning aims to collect learning and teaching feedback and use this feedback to guide teachers to adjust teaching strategies to promote more practical understanding. Focus on development and regularly adjust learning and teaching needs. It can also be called "progressive assessment." However, the so-called formative assessment usually focuses on more minor learning points (Applied Learning Group, Curriculum Development Division, Education in Hong Kong Bureau, 2015).

Assessment for learning focuses on reviewing students' learning progress and analyzing how much knowledge or skills students have mastered. This kind of summative assessment carries out at the end of a course or unit, and the object of assessment is often a larger learning area.

4.3.2 Guiding Principles of Evaluation

When designing an Applied Learning coursework assessment, the following guiding principles should be met (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017):

- Match learning objectives;
- Take into account students' learning differences and learning progress;
- Track the learning process;
- Give timely encouragement;
- Consider school context and daily life situations;
- Provide peer assessment and self-assessment;
- Incorporate assessment data feedback.

4.3.3 Evaluation procedure

Applied Learning course assessment is subject-based and carried out by course instructors. Instructors make professional judgments based on the joint assessment criteria listed in the assessment syllabus and relevant course documents to be fair, objective, reliable, and credible.

In actual operation, the instructor designs assessment activities, balances between progressive assessment (continuous) and summative assessment (end of course), and evaluates students' learning activities (including written tests, project study, presentation, group discussion, class assignment, etc.), assessing different knowledge, skills, and career-related values and attitudes. Assessment activities must be carried out in different modes and at various stages of the curriculum, considering factors such as the authenticity of assessment activities, the balance between theory and application, and the balanced development of practical skills and intelligence (The Curriculum Development Council and the Hongkong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2017).

The assessment framework for each Applied Learning subject is centered around jointly assessing assignments to compare assessment results from different classes taught within the subject. Co-assessed tasks can be formative or summative, designed by the course provider, and primarily carried out by the course tutor. Evidence collected through joint assessment assignments should be relatively objective for retrospection and reference. With a sound quality assurance mechanism, ensure that the assessment of Applied Learning closely follows the purpose and design principles of the courses. The assessment results submitted by course providers for each Applied Learning curriculums could be reviewed by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (Curriculum Development Division, 2010).

4.3.4 Grade and Application of Evaluation

Under the HKDSE system, students' assessment results in Applied Learning subjects will be recorded on the HKDSE certificate issued by the HKEAA. This certificate provides students who have completed secondary school with general qualifications applicable to further education, employment, further education, and training (Table 3).

Table 3: Applied Learning Performance Assessment Scale

Applied Learning Performance Assessment Scale	
Applied Learning Subjects (3 levels)	Applied Learning Chinese (For non-Chinese speaking students) (2 levels)
① Reach the standard	① Reach the standard
② Achieved and performed well I	② Achieved and performed well
Equivalent to Level 4 or above in Category A subjects of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination	

③ Achieved and performed well II	Equivalent to Level 3 results in Category A subjects of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination
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In the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination under the new senior high school system, students can take six subjects and choose the best five subject score to apply for universities. The exam results can be retained for one year and used in an application in the second year (Figure 8) (Education Bureau, 2023).

Table 4: Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE)

Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) (2023-2025) (Applied Learning Section Curriculum Development Institute of Education Bureau, 2022)		
Category A (24 basic subjects)	Category B	Category C
Core subjects (4)	Applied Science Subjects	Other language subjects
Chinese Language, English, Mathematics, General Education	6 areas of study	French German Hindi
Elective subjects (20, choose 2)	58 courses	Japanese Spanish Urdu

5. Applied Learning Quality Recognition

At present, more and more secondary school students in Hong Kong are taking Applied Learning courses. Applied learning subjects are equivalent to other subjects in the HKDSE examination, and the results can be used for admission to Higher Diploma and Associate Degree. With the vigorous promotion of Vocational and Professional Education by the Education Bureau, Applied Learning courses, Diploma Yi Jin, the Higher Diploma, and the Applied Degree courses being piloted will gradually form a learning path from the 4th year of secondary schools to Bachelor's degree. In the future, higher diplomas/advanced certificates, professional diplomas/professional certificates (levels 4-6 of the qualifications framework) are expected to link up with the master's degree (level 6 of the qualifications framework) and then apply for a doctoral degree (level 7 of the qualifications framework), realizing the dual-track system (Table 4).

Table 4: Applied Learning Quality Recognition

Applied Learning Quality Recognition		
Application	Qualification Level	Acceptance
Progression to Bachelor Degree Programs	Qualifications Framework Level 5	※ Approved Applied Learning courses. ※ Some institutions, colleges or programs accept Applied Learning subjects as elective subjects, extra points, or additional supplementary materials.
Progression to Associate Degree Program	Qualifications Framework Level 4	In the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, students who have achieved Level 2 or above in five subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language) can apply for admission. Grades for Applied Learning subjects may be submitted.
DSE	Qualifications Framework Level 3	• Accept up to 2 HKDSE Applied Learning subjects
Employment Apply for civil servants	Qualifications Framework Level 3	• Accept up to 2 HKDSE Applied Learning subjects • The results of "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction" in Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) are accepted as meeting the Chinese language proficiency requirements for the relevant civil service ranks

6. Reflection: Improvement Suggestions for HK Applied Learning

In 2020, the Task Force on Promoting VPET and the School Curriculum Review Task Force collected and sorted out the industry's and academia's improvement opinions on applied learning, focusing on aspects: (1) curriculum construction; (2) publicity and promotion; (3) improvement of the study mode; (4) quality recognition and multiple connections (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2020) (Table 5).

Table 5: Applied Learning Improvement

Suggestions of Improving Applied Learning	
Curriculum Construction	Promote Applied Learning as a valuable high school elective subject; provide more diversified Applied Learning courses.
Publicity and Promotion	Deepen teachers' and principals' understanding of career-oriented education; strengthen teacher training; strengthen cooperation with industry partners; broaden students' and parents' understanding of vocational and professional education.

Improvement of Study Mode	Start implementing Applied Learning earlier in the 4th year of secondary school; allow Applied Learning to be taken as a fourth elective subject; offer Applied Learning Orientation courses in junior secondary schools to enable students to learn about different industries, professions, and Applied Learning courses early; introduce learning models to encourage schools to offer applied learning courses, which is different from the previous model 1 and model 2.
Quality Recognition and Multiple Connections	Develop vocational education learning pathways that start with applied learning and offer opportunities for higher diploma and top-up degree programs.

7. Conclusions: General High Schools in Mainland China Try to Promote Vocational Oriented Education

As an essential part of China's education system, senior high school education is not only the continuation and expansion of nine-year compulsory education and the preparation and transition to higher education. In Mainland China, high school education system includes secondary vocational schools and general high school schools. The relationship between the two has always been the focus of attention (Xu,2022). The "Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China" implemented on May 1, 2022, proposes: "The state optimizes the educational structure at the high school stage, scientifically allocates educational resources, adapts measures to local conditions at different stages after compulsory education, and promotes the coordinated development of vocational education and general education."

Promoting applied learning as a valuable high school elective subject in Hong Kong embodies the essence of the multi-integration model. Through the quality framework, vocational education and general education are realized in parallel. Promoting the coordinated development of vocational education and general education both in senior high school is an effective model. Hongkong's experience provides a reference for promoting career-oriented education in general high schools in mainland China. The coexistence of mixed vocational education in general secondary schools is the most significant feature of the multi-integration model, which is conducive to improving the current separation between general high schools and secondary vocational schools in mainland China. Enrich the connotation of current career education and coordinate general education development during the secondary stage.

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