Secondary 2 Streaming and its Implications

Singapore's education system has all this while aim to bring out the best in every child. The whole child develops holistically, hopefully, into lifelong learners and acquire a set of competencies in order to thrive in the 21st century. The Singapore education system has multiple educational pathways that cater to the different strengths and interests of every student. The recent announcement on the change from Express/Normal (Academic) /Normal (Technical) streaming to Subject-Based-Banding from Year 2024 onwards is an excellent example of capitalizing on the strengths of each child.

While the Ministry of Education has numerous different pathways to cater for the diversified needs and talents for all students, for the purpose of this paper, it will focus on one of the pathways, which is the Secondary Two Streaming Exercise. This is an annual process that takes place in all Singapore secondary schools. Towards the end of the secondary 2, all students will be allocated to their subject combinations that they are supposed to take for their Upper Secondary level. The subjects that the students take will, in some ways, prepare them for their postsecondary studies. Generally speaking, the subject options that students will take up largely depend on their interest and their future aspirations that they hope to pursue. Before this article deals with the how to make subject choices in greater detail, let us look at the following example which shows how one of the secondary schools in Singapore arranged her subject combination options (in which the school did not offer Principles of Accounts / Design and Technology / Food & Nutrition). These subject options vary from schools to schools and hence, it is useful to check with the relevant school in which the student is in.

Secondary 3 Subjects Combination Options:

Option A: Double Humanities

1. English Language
2. Mother Tongue Language
3. Elementary Mathematics
4. Social Studies + Geography or Social Studies + History or Social Studies + English Literature
5. Geography or History
6. Chemistry + Physics or Chemistry + Biology
7. Additional Mathematics or Art

Option B: Double Sciences

1. English
2. Mother Tongue Language
3. Elementary Mathematics
4. Additional Mathematics
5. Chemistry
6. Biology or Physics
7. Social Studies + Geography or Social Studies + History or Social Studies + English Literature

Option C: Triple Sciences

1. English
2. Mother Tongue Language
3. Elementary Mathematics
4. Additional Mathematics
5. Chemistry
6. Physics
7. Biology
8. Social Studies + Geography or Social Studies + History

It is neither the intention of this article to discuss in detail on the above choice selections for students nor deal with the hybrid combinations and flexibility in subject combinations. Instead, in the name of practicality, the focus is going back to the basics in guiding both parents and students on making informed choices.

Based on the 3 subject combinations above, it is obvious that the education landscape has shifted from the Science / Commerce / Arts stream to one where most students take quite a number of fixed subjects i.e. English, Mother Tongue, Mathematics, Sciences and Combined Humanities. In this way, students enjoy a breadth of subject disciplines which can also be used to alert them on their strengths that is recommended to help them to make suitable choices of their subject combinations selection; something that will eventually affect their further education in terms of

courses they select for their Polytechnic Education as well as the streams they take up should they go for the Junior College (JC) route.

An engineering course offered by a local polytechnic would best have a Double Science option since the rigor can take a toll on students especially when they progress higher in their studies. Foundation programs (e.g. Additional Mathematics) embedded in engineering courses will be a good platform to bridge any skills deficit; however, it is never a replacement on the proficient skills that take 2 years' to build in preparing the subject(s) for their O levels examinations. Likewise, every school has its own requirements in its students' admission exercise. It pays to physically check on each student's eligibility taking any of the subjects or even going to that particular Polytechnic or JC for the school's orientation. For example for Science subjects in some JCs, a student may have to take the same subject at O level. Specifically, it means that in order to take H1/H2 Chemistry in XYZ JC, a student must have attained a pass in his/her O level Pure Chemistry or at least Combined Science (with Chemistry). Further Mathematics is a subject available only at H2 level. Students with A1 in Elementary Mathematics and A2 in Additional Mathematics may stand a higher chance to qualify for that JC. This subject combination options at upper secondary level may even subsequently impact a student's future in further studies. For example, for whatever reasons, if a student takes only one Science subject in 'A' Levels, he/she will be unable to meet the requirements for future Engineering courses in the National University of Singapore. This is because the University's Engineering courses require at least 2 Science subjects offered at the A level. Hence, it pays to choose wisely at the upper secondary school so that the subject combination options will land the student with sufficient weightage in Sciences that eventually lands the same student with his/her desired course in the local university.

A real look at oneself

Ask a qualified psychologist about a person's innate ability. Invariably, they will define it as a person's natural ability in areas like language skills, problem solving abilities, skillful with hands-on work, good psychomotor abilities, musical flair or ability to express eloquently or listen emphatically. As much as students go great lengths to find out the various hybrid subject combinations, on hindsight, it is also very useful for students to ask themselves if the subjects they study (or want to invest their future career) are align to their values, preferences, strengths and weakness. Trying to fit a hole into a square peg may result, in the future, a lost sense of purpose and disorientation. Even if a student graduates from his/her selected course of study, without a proper match between subject studied / chosen career with his/her personality, the work done will unlikely be achieved at the optimum performance. This is only result in a hit in the wall.

Still no idea on what to do even after reading this, or no idea what to do in the future, — take a Science combination (provided the student can handle Science subjects), it opens more doors for whatever future options, practically speaking. A Science graduate can, subsequently, go the Arts options for further study / career but not the other way round since Arts subject has no or little prerequisite(s) in order to study the course.

Conclusion

William Ernest Henley once mentioned, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." While this may be true since students will ultimately still need to decide for the course and subjects to take themselves, parents can play a part in the decision making process. Most importantly, teachers who have industry working experiences and caring enough and understand the students' academic prowess and natural inclination towards the subjects' nature, can also help a vital part in providing sound advice to students so as to help students navigate along this mine field of choices.

Finally, do not forget to research extensively, think through, and choose wisely in an informed manner!

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