

THE HONG LOK YUEN SCHOOL ASSOCIATION LIMITED

HISTORY

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Abbreviations:

HLYSA : Hong Lok Yuen School Association Ltd
HLYE : Hong Lok Yuen Estates Ltd

Preface

The aim of this paper is to describe the development of the Orchard Kindergarten, Hong Lok Yuen School, and Hong Lok Yuen School Association Limited. These organisations developed from within a community to meet its special multi-cultural and international needs. They differ from Hong Kong Government Schools or other Independent Schools in Hong Kong or abroad, because they developed to meet the unique requirements of the Hong Lok Yuen community in Hong Kong.

The Board of Governors are the employers, and guardians of the objectives. These objectives will, in the future, be best protected through the most thorough understanding of the way in which the HLYSA developed. This paper attempts to summarise its development but, for the sake of brevity, certain parts of the history may not be recorded.

The present framework of the Association was arrived at after much research and experience. The result is a tested and organised structure. However, it is not really the 'structure' which succeeds or fails, but the people within it. A vital ingredient of its success will always be the careful recruitment of the best people available in Hong Kong and within the financial capabilities of this independent organisation.

It is not the aim of this paper to specify names of those involved in the development of the Kindergarten, School, and Association. However, certain personalities are mentioned to allow a reasonably full description of events to be made. There are many other people whose names are not recorded, whose contribution to this organisation has been, and continues to be, inestimable.

The Beginnings

Hong Lok Yuen Estates Limited (HLYE) were required by the Government to construct, and operate, a 12 classroom School at Hong Lok Yuen by 2nd March 1985. In 1981, a number of resident parents who had moved to HLY with various schooling options, found these options lost to them or quite impractical. Research revealed that the HLY School would not be a reality for four years, and from the example of a sister development in the New Territories, it would be unlikely to cater for the children of the HLY community. It was also seen that the development and sale of residential units would probably remain a priority over infrastructure and facilities. Additionally, there was no obligation upon HLYE to place any emphasis on type or quality of Education.

The initial group of interested Parents consisted of a number of people who looked forward to relatively long term employment in Hong Kong, and who felt that HLY must have a school worthy of its advertised high standards.

Research

Firstly, it was most important to establish exactly what type of School parents wanted. In November 1981, 13 resident parents, who had children of pre-school and primary ages, held a meeting to see if it would be considered worthwhile to research the requirements of residents, and encourage an early start to the planned Educational facilities at HLY. This was done, and ideas were put to the developers in December 1981. It became known later that, during this time, HLYE had been conducting their own preliminary research into possible School operators, which included E.S.F., Church Schools, and Government Subvented Schools.

The group of parents formed themselves into a Steering Committee, and undertook their research into the requirements of the existing residential community, both Chinese and Expatriate, through the medium of open meetings (3), questionnaires (4), circulars, and news bulletins (17).

Details of the development of Schools and Kindergartens in Hong Kong, Australia, and the United Kingdom were obtained, and the Steering Committee met frequently to plan options and proposals. Educational experts were invited to give talks and to make recommendations. These included experienced representatives from the Education Department, a senior educationalist from the Diocesan Girls School, the Chairman of the Pre-School Playgroups Association, Mr Bill Lowe, and other educationalists. Personal visits were made to a number of Schools, most particularly the Kellett School, which had started a few years earlier, based on maximum parental involvement, and which considerably influenced the beginnings of this School.

The Orchard Kindergarten

After many meetings a basic proposal was presented by the Steering Committee to HLYE. HLYE then provided a model house for temporary use as a Playschool or Kindergarten. The Education Department registration procedure was undertaken by the parent group, teaching staff were recruited, the model house was adapted, and on 14th April 1982, the Orchard Kindergarten opened with 19 Children and 3 Teachers.

Objectives

The objectives, in basic form, had become:

The provision of the best environment possible to enable the promotion of the highest standards of pre-school and primary school education consistent with the broad interests of the multi-cultural community at Hong Lok Yuen. The main route to this would be:

- a. the maintenance of small classes, catering for their multi-cultural nature, and providing for individual attention.
- b. the employment of the most motivated and qualified Teachers available, within financial constraints, and
- c. the best possible physical environment.

The Hong Lok Yuen School

Research and development continued, aimed at the formulation and presentation of a viable proposal which could be seen to be attractive to both the developers and the parents. Occupancy of houses at HLY was increasing at a lower rate than had been anticipated, and the steering committee placed emphasis in their proposal upon the positive effect that a School, providing a high standard of education and facilities, would have on house sales and occupancy rates.

Eventually a comprehensive proposal was presented to HLYE, based on an individual debenture system through which parents would finance, own, and operate the School. The School would be constructed immediately, and would cater for a maximum of 400 children. Within the proposal was presented a quantity survey of the project, conducted by a Quantity Surveyor with previous experience of a similar private School in Hong Kong. The quality of education was strongly emphasised in this proposal, and financial estimates were detailed. The developers considered this proposal thoroughly.

The H.L.Y.S.A. Ltd

During this period, work proceeded to register the School Association, and the Orchard Kindergarten grew from strength to strength.

The Steering Committee submitted further recommendations to the developers. The first proposal presented had referred to a School of 400 children, financed by individual debentures. Over the months, the concept of debentures came under increasing attack from parents, and this fact was made known to HLYE. Many meetings were held with the developers to try to find alternative ways to proceed.

Throughout these early discussions with the developers, Mr. George Yeadon, General Manager of HLYE, had been most helpful in listening to the views and proposals of the steering committee, and many constructive initiatives were mapped out with him. A long period of time elapsed before a formal response could come from HLYE.

In July 1982, HLYE presented their counter-proposal. The essence of this was a much smaller School, to be built as a two-stage development of first eight, then 12 classrooms. Debentures would not be necessary, as the capital costs would be met by HLYE, and HLYSA would establish the operation and manage the School. In return for the capital outlay, the parents would allocate 20% of gross School Fees as rent to HLYE.

The fee-related element of the counter-proposal was extremely attractive to the Parents because it meant that debentures would not be required, and that the School could grow carefully, with a financial commitment related directly to enrolment and fee income. It also meant that both the parents and the developers shared a mutual interest in the successful development of the School. The developers presented a School Building Design by Mr Clifford Wong, Managing Director of HLYE, within their counter-proposal.

There immediately followed a period in which the steering committee completed the registration of the Hong Lok Yuen School Association Limited, and carefully considered the developers proposal, negotiating some modifications to it. The newly registered Hong Lok Yuen School Association signed a joint venture agreement with Hong Lok Yuen Estates Limited, and the basis for the existence of the Hong Lok Yuen School was established.

The joint-venture agreement

The fundamentals of the agreement made on 16th Sept 82 were as follows:

1. HLYE would construct and equip the School building (phase 1) as soon as possible, and maintain the building. Phase 2 would be built when needed.
2. HLYSA would operate the School, and pay a rental of 20% of fee income to HLYE.
3. The Board of Governors of the HLYSA would consist of 12 members; 6 Appointed (from HLYE), and 6 Elected from the Association Membership. The Chairman would always be an Elected Board Member, and would have the casting vote.
4. The School would operate for the benefit of residents of HLY, but would not exclude non-residents while space remained. In order to meet the needs of HLY residents, it would be bi-cultural.
5. Classes would be limited to about 20 children.

Following the agreement, HLYE commenced the approval and construction programme, while HLYSA started staff recruitment and the School registration procedures required by the Education Department, and formulated the Articles of Association.

Articles / EGM

An E.G.M. was held on 1st Feb 83, at which the first Board of Governors and Association membership approved the Articles of Association.

Management Policy

The Board made the following policy decisions of immediate importance:

1. The School would not be subvented to Government to allow the freedom necessary to achieve the high standards hoped for by everyone.

2. The formal management structure would broadly comprise:

BOARD OF GOVERNORS (HLYSA Members, by Election)
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (School/Kindergarten)
(Principals, Supervisor(s))
TEACHING STAFF
OTHER STAFF

3. The School and Kindergarten operation would be kept separate so that the Kindergarten children would not feel that they were going to formal school.

The need for Management Committees separate from the Board was dictated by Education Department requirements. These are that Principals and Headteachers would usually be members of these committees, each containing a maximum of 5 members. Each member must be 'approved' by the Education Department and one member of each Management Committee must be the Supervisor. The responsibilities of these committees, through the Supervisors are to the Education Department for:

- Compliance with the Education Ordinance
- Safety, Health, Insurance.

Each supervisor is immediately responsible to the local or District Education Officer. The Board also requires that each Management Committee is responsible to the Board for the satisfactory day-to-day operation of the School and Kindergarten.

The 'intermediate' Kindergarten

By now it had become clear that the School would not be in operation until September 1983, but there were already children in the Orchard Kindergarten who were reaching primary school age, and older children moving to HLY or transferring from other primary schools. A vertically streamed primary class was formed to cater for these children of differing age groups. It was an unqualified success. The children within it gained immensely from the individual attention of the Teacher, Mrs Diana Anthony, and the caring atmosphere of her classroom. Additionally, two kindergarten classes continued to grow, and the happy success of the Orchard Kindergarten was a pleasure to all concerned.

The School Principal

From the outset it had been the Board's intention to promote teacher-to-head, as had been the case with the Kellett School. All financial aspects of the proposal had assumed this fact, although of course a considerable salary differential had been allowed for the Principal. However, the only really experienced and suitable candidate from within the organisation, Mrs Diana Anthony, had to return to the U.K. at the completion of her husband's tour in Hong Kong. The Board had not previously felt that the organisation could afford to obtain the services of a highly experienced Principal in the early days of the School, but gradually the idea became more realistic.

One of the main attractions in establishing the School with an experienced Headteacher, was that he or she would help the School to grow quickly and with confidence, without uncertainties and delays. The Board all had considerable pressures in their primary professions, and could only afford to spend so much time in administering the School. Already, the work required was almost full time, involving a devotion to the task of establishing the School, which prevented almost all recreation and leisure.

After considerable discussion, the Board formulated and presented a revised proposal to the developers, asking for financial assistance which would allow the employment of an experienced Principal. In this proposal, future cost estimates were shown in detail, and a break-even figure of approximately 120 children was established. Beyond this number, the operational costs could be born internally, and HLYE would need to provide no more support. After lengthy consideration, HLYE, who could also see the mutual benefits of a rapid expansion of the School, agreed to help, and the necessary support was given.

Meanwhile, the Board had begun a search locally and abroad for a suitable Principal. Locally, very few candidates appeared with the experience, and philosophy of education required. Eventually, in the Spring of 1983, through the services of a London-based educational consultancy, Mr David Holford came to Hong Kong to be interviewed for the position of the first Headmaster of the Hong Lok Yuen Primary School. He was offered the position which he accepted.

Mr Holford's motivation and excitement for the School were infectious. His previous experience abroad, and his eight years as a Headmaster, gave the Board great confidence. Mr Holford returned to Hong Kong for a short working visit in May 1983 during which he met with present and future Parents of the School and Kindergarten. At this Parents meeting, he outlined his ideas on primary education and his confidence in the bi-cultural nature of this School. He departed with the wide support of everyone concerned. His employment contract was for three years.

Upon returning to U.K. Mr Holford helped enormously with the procurement of Educational furniture and materials for the initial equipping of the School, and he eventually came to Hong Kong with his family in August 1983. During his time in U.K. he helped to formulate academic policy, and provided an outline curriculum for the School. In August, he assisted in the recruitment of the School's first Head of Chinese Studies, Mr Quentin Chan.

School opening

The Hong Lok Yuen School building was finished in record time. Container loads of equipment came from the U.K.. Sleepless nights were in abundance while meetings stretched into the small hours aimed at resolving last minute problems. However, after a great deal of work, good organisation and cooperation amongst everyone concerned, the Hong Lok Yuen School opened on 14th of Sept 1983 with 33 children, using seven classrooms and a library. During the first term, standards were set, and systems were established. Extra-School activities were founded which began to make the School more of a focal point for the community. The first School fair on 3rd Dec 83 was a remarkable success, and School attendance grew rapidly.

The Official opening of the School took place during the second term of the School, on 28th Jan 84. The School was opened jointly by Mr Ian Macpherson OBE., JP., the then Regional Secretary to the New Territories, and Mr Clifford Wong, Managing Director of Hong Lok Yuen Estates Limited.

1984

Although the School had got off to an excellent start, 1984 proved to be a most depressing year in Hong Kong. World recession and local political uncertainty reduced many activities to a standstill, and some businesses collapsed. Many expatriate professionals returned to their home countries, and this contraction severely reduced the availability of Teaching Staff for the School.

The Hong Kong property market had collapsed, and as a result, HLYE had little income from house sales for a long period of time. However, the Hong Lok Yuen School and Orchard Kindergarten attracted people to live at HLY, and the School grew in only one year from 33 to 90 children. This compared with contraction in many other Schools. Such an expansion gave rise to concern about the availability of space in the not-too-distant future. Early in 1984, the Board asked the developers to give the go-ahead for Phase 2 of the School.

The Orchard Kindergarten was now under the Headship of Mrs Preece, and was so popular that there were over 60 children in the temporary model-house location, and many on the waiting list. A new purpose-built Kindergarten had already been proposed to the developers by the Board, in the hope that an additional joint-venture could be worked out. However, regardless of numerous requests for the go-ahead on both Phase 2 of the School, and a new Kindergarten joint-venture, HLYE were unable to give any assurances during 1984 that either project would go ahead.

This period was a very trying and gloomy one for the Board, and morale began to drop. The School, without the construction of Phase 2, had two classes with nowhere to go in September 1985. The demand for places in the Orchard Kindergarten was increasing, but it could not take more children and still continue to provide the high standard of pre-school education for which it had become known in both academic and non-academic circles in Hong Kong. At the time of the original joint-venture agreement, an area adjacent to the School had been offered as a playing field, but once again economic restrictions prevented the commencement of levelling and seeding until the end of 1984. Long-standing plans for an Adventure Playground adjacent to the School also had to be shelved due to uncertainty regarding a suitable plot of land. During 1984, the area allocated for the playing field came under consideration for use as a Golf Driving Range by the HLY Country Club in order to attract more membership. Fortunately for the HLYSA, this idea was eventually found to be impractical.

Resignation of Principal

As if all of these setbacks were not enough, towards the end of 1984, Mr Holford presented his resignation to the Board. The Board immediately tried to persuade both Mr and Mrs Holford to stay, but without success. This event came as a great shock to the Board, and at the time there could have been no single event more serious for the School. The reasons given by Mr Holford for his resignation were numerous and personal, and the Board had no alternative but to accept his resignation. The expiry date of notice fell in May 1985, and it was agreed with Mr Holford that his departure mid-term would be most disruptive to the School. Mr Holford would not extend notice to the end of term, so it was agreed that he would leave at the end of the Spring Term 1985, and we would have an acting-Principal for the Summer Term, while the Board recruited a permanent replacement.

Revised joint-venture agreement

Following the Sino-British agreement on the future of Hong Kong, confidence returned. The property market slowly changed direction, and the Board redoubled their efforts with HLYE to get the essential projects moving. Finally, in January 85, a further revision was agreed to the joint-venture agreement, and the Phase 2 of the School plus a new purpose-built Kindergarten received the go-ahead, for completion in September 85, and Easter 86, respectively. A notice was sent to Teachers and Parents informing them of this news, and of Mr Holford's resignation.

Acting Principal

To fill the gap now created at the School during the coming Summer Term, Mrs Lesley Preece (Headteacher of the Orchard Kindergarten), agreed to be acting-Principal of the School, reflecting her considerable commitment to the School and Kindergarten. Miss Julia Kwong capably ran the Orchard Kindergarten as acting Headteacher.

Recruitment of New Principal

Meanwhile, the Board started a comprehensive search for a new Principal for the School. After many months of advertising, interviews, and short-listing, in Hong Kong and the U.K., Mrs Kathleen van Teeckelenburgh was selected as the Principal of the Hong Lok Yuen School. Mrs van Teeckelenburgh, who was selected from an initial 45 applicants, is highly qualified and experienced for this position.

Summary

The History of the development of the HLYSA has probably followed lines typical of a growing organisation. The amalgum of experiences gained have taught the first Board a great deal. There seemed at times to be more difficulties than were warranted, but from each problem there stemmed a clearer understanding of the most practical and proper solutions.

The Kindergarten and School grew from the community at Hong Lok Yuen, and are therefore bi-cultural and bi-lingual institutions. They began their lives through Parental involvement. Together, these features make them unique in Hong Kong.

The HLYSA has been structured by Parents to represent their interests comprehensively in the early education of their children. Parental involvement is assured through direct representation to elected membership of the Board of Governors, which oversees the management of the Association. The Board therefore considers that the creation of any other parallel associations would be unnecessary and counter-productive. Channels already exist which allow maximum participation in the Kindergarten and School by any member of the HLYSA, through the Elected Members, and sub-committees.

The development of the Association was undertaken in the free time of Board Members. This work has been, and always will be, voluntary, and the activities of the Association are non-profit-making. These two significant characteristics of the operation allow the Orchard Kindergarten and Hong Lok Yuen School to offer pre-school and primary education of a standard which, in relation to fees, has few parallels in Hong Kong.

It is hoped that this paper will be studied carefully by future Elected and Appointed Board Members, Management Staff, Teaching Staff, and Parents. It should lead to the realisation that what we have now is the basis for a special and significant environment for young children of any culture, in which they may learn together in a bi-cultural environment, and a caring atmosphere, and be best equipped to meet the coming challenges of change which will be inevitable in their own generation of the twenty-first century.

John Bent

Related information:

- HLYSA Ltd Articles of Association
- HLYSA Ltd Policy
- Prospectus
- Year Books
- Joint-Venture Agreement (revised 1985)