

Building professional partnerships — capacity building, coupled with a well-defined focus, purpose and meaning, is the key

When asked if people are the most important asset in an organisation, few would argue otherwise. That said, as educational professionals, we know we need a shared and strong commitment to developing our students and ourselves into life-long learners in order that we can all be a true asset.

The theme of our last issue, "Realising Our Students' Potential", provides a different lens through which to see learner diversity. It is a challenge that requires not only commitment from each of us, but also collaboration among ourselves to build knowledge and to share practice that helps our students to make the best possible achievement. In this partnership, we are learning by doing – by exploring, applying and sharing an array of approaches to help our students to be their very best. At the same time, we are realising our own potential as educators in that we understand more about learning and become better equipped to maximise learning for all.

For those who attended Professor Michael Fullan's public lecture¹ on "Leading Systemic Change" on 18 November 2013, there are at least two very important takeaways, i.e. "focus, focus, focus" and "lateral capacity building". With realising students' potential as a key educational goal, we commit ourselves to a plethora of tasks, ranging from curriculum development to implementation and from review to improvement. To ensure coherence and build leverage for continuous improvement, we need to set priorities and identify strategic focuses that tap into each school manager's and teacher's strengths and promote lateral learning and collaboration between and among them. This is also what we in the NET Section have been striving to achieve so that we can provide stronger support for students' literacy development and teachers' professional growth.

Since our establishment, we have been developing various platforms to forge partnerships with and between our NETs and LETs. These include our signature literacy programmes, Seed projects, school-based support programmes and annual competitions. To build greater coherence and leverage, as highlighted in the last issue, we will be promoting READ – reading across the curriculum, e-learning, assessment as and for learning, and differentiated instruction – as our strategic focuses in the coming years.

With respect to realising students' potential, we can barely bring about the expected curriculum and pedagogical change simply by putting in place the said programmes, projects and competitions. We need informed and dedicated professionals working in partnership to make the change. To this end, we need to create conditions that promote collaboration with and among our teachers to explore, develop and trial strategies, and to share, examine and reflect on practice, successful or otherwise. We have been promoting this kind of collaboration through the introduction of a professional development cycle as an integral part of our school support service. It comprises the provision of professional input through centralised and school-based professional development programmes, collaborative lesson planning with our NETs and LETs, offering classroom support to model teaching strategies, engaging teachers in reflecting on their practice and reviewing progress, and, of course, celebrating successes with them, big and small.

Recently I learnt from a veteran Advisory Teacher how a purposeful and meaningful task – the implementation of our literacy programme at P1 – has helped to bring English panel members together since the start of this school year. For this shared commitment, the teachers concerned, including the NET, have been working closely together and learning from each other. With effective school leadership and our onsite support, apart from students' literacy development, the joint efforts have contributed to the growth of a collaborative culture among the teachers that values learning, respects each other's contributions and celebrates success together.

Successful professional partnerships are those characterised by a well-defined focus, a shared commitment to learning, mutual respect and appreciation. In this issue, we celebrate these partnerships, emerging, growing and established, with stories from our close partners, including NETs, English panel chairs and school principals. Let's enjoy the stories and get inspired to build more effective partnerships and to take a step further towards realising our students' potential and ours.

Joe Leung

Chief Curriculum Development Officer, NET Section

¹The public lecture was co-organised by the Education Bureau and the Hong Kong Institute of Education and held on 18 November 2013 in the Lecture Theatre of the Kowloon Tong Educational Services Centre.

Unleashing Our Potential through the Forging of Professional Partnerships

It has been a wonderful journey having different Native English-speaking Teachers (NETs) teaching in our school since the Primary NET Scheme was launched more than a decade ago. Besides the NET recruited from the NET Section, our school has employed English Language Teacher Assistants (ELTAs) to enhance the language learning environment for all our students. The combination of NETs, ELTAs and our Local English Teachers (LETs) has provided us with not only a language-enriched context but also a culturally-enriched professional community, with different nationalities as well as personalities.

As teachers nowadays are no longer working alone as individual professionals, collaboration among teachers is indeed essential for lateral learning and professional development. In order to embrace the differences and uniqueness each individual teacher possesses, mutual respect is the key of all core values that brings about quality professional partnerships. Through professional exchanges in every co-planning and co-teaching session, our team has been striving for the betterment of learning and teaching processes in terms of pedagogical application, teaching content enrichment and its delivery. We deeply appreciate our NETs' always contributing their best and exercising flexibility to work with various LETs who do have their own teaching style



and preferences. NETs, in our experience, have been great team players providing a dynamic source of positive input for our school's capacity building.

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Under the great leadership of our panel heads, as well as the excellent professional guidance by the NET Section's Advisory Teachers, the potential of our teaching team has been unleashed and further leveraged.

In fact, the professional partnership has been empowered by the warm fellowship

building within and beyond the school campus. With a caring and sharing culture, we are committed to making our school an inviting place for our students, teachers, staff, parents and all other stakeholders alike. Of utmost importance, it is the sense of ownership of the school's overall development as well as our students' achievements that make the teaching profession purposeful and sustainable!

Sylvia Chan Principal, Ma On Shan Ling Liang Primary School

Learning English with Faith

Ms. Faith has been working as the NET in C.C.C. Kei Faat Primary School for approximately two years. She is a brave dreamer with a strong sense of mission to serve students of low socioeconomic background.

Ms. Faith is a very committed and devoted teacher. Apart from the reading programme, she makes every effort to cultivate an English learning community in the school. In order to enable English learning outside the classroom and to develop a multi-dimensional learning experience for the students, she has taken the students to visit a supermarket and she uses her lunchtime for the English Channel Broadcast. The P.5 and P.6 students have gained much confidence from this experiential learning.

Last year, Ms. Faith played an active role in the school exchange programme. She helped to lead the Singapore Exchange Visit during which she opened her home to all students and teachers and invited them for dinner. Students' learning was much enhanced as a result of the greater sense of participation.

"Faith is to see what you have not seen, and the reward for faith is to see what you believe". Our dear Ms. Faith indeed is a lady with great faith. She shows courage and confidence in her daily teaching, and is a firm believer of the value of cooperation with the others as partners. For instance, Ms. Faith has tried every effort to make a difference within the local educational environment.

She sees every student as a unique individual, and believes that learning English as a second language should take place in a creative learning community where students can create breakthroughs. As Ms. Faith has said, "As parents and teachers, we should be strength detectives and seek out as many talents and abilities in our children as we can".

With our Faith, Love and Hope, our children are surely heading towards a better future.

Wong Lui Sze Principal, C.C.C. Kei Faat Primary School



NET Collaboration

Mr. John Croft, one of the most popular NETs that I have worked with, has been a member of our English team since January, 2001. He has, on many occasions, collaborated with our team members and helped establish a warm and caring English environment in our school.

Most notably, Mr. Croft created a programme of overseas study tours that have seen our students, together with many different colleagues in the English Department, visit Australia, New Zealand, England, France, Spain and Norway in the last decade. All their memorable experiences of the trips have been vividly captured in articles published in our well sought-after English Newsletter "Connect" edited by John.

Mr. Croft has also worked together with local English teachers in training students for a range of inter-school activities which include debating, public speaking and, most interestingly of all, Australian bush dancing. John has also been involved with a variety of real-time on-line activities with schools in Sabah and China.

Mr. Croft is always willing to share his teaching ideas and worksheets with all his colleagues and has often encouraged teachers to observe his lessons. He has definitely set a very good model for our team members. For our last English Week, he designed a programme of events that actively involved all members of the English Panel.

His willingness to cooperate with colleagues is unquestionable and his popularity among them is just as evident. Not only is he a positive force in the workplace, he is also good company outside work. Thank you, John, for making such a wonderful difference to our school.



'Yeah! We like having PLP-R/W lessons with Mr. Navez.'

'Yeah! We like having PLP-R/W lessons with Mr. Navez.' Our Primary 1 and 2 students enjoy learning with our NET, Mr. Navez, very much.

Mr. Navez joined our school team last year. He brings alive the English Monday gatherings for all students and teachers. He has helped us to set up the English Ambassadors team and trained these students to perform mini-dramas and role-plays on the stage. He has conducted vocabulary activities, reading activities and variety shows for students from time to time. For cultural awareness, Mr. Navez also reinforced this to a great extent last year. There were meaningful English learning activities related to Mid-Autumn Festival, National Day, Halloween, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Easter, Thanksgiving... Mr. Navez decorated the English boards beautifully for all these occasions. All his hard work paved the way for students' English learning, with fun.

For teaching and learning, Mr. Navez has developed a school-based Speaking Curriculum for our Primary 6 students.

Through this Speaking enrichment programme, students are equipped with the skills and confidence necessary for the secondary school interviews. He has organised other cooperative learning activities in the lessons to help to cater for learner diversity in class. With all the LETs, Mr. Navez has also helped set up the weekly English Funland activities for our students.

Co-teaching between NET and LETs is also quite successful in our school. Before the PLP-R/W lessons, all the co-teachers - LETs, NET and CA and our Advisory Teacher, Ms. Garlanda Kwan, co-plan and adjust all the teaching and learning activities. During the lessons, all the co-teachers play their unique and functional role in the lessons. While the NET and LET apply their professional knowledge in their teaching, the CA helps with the classroom management and caters for the special needs of some weak learners.

With all members of our English team including our NET, Mr. Navez, collaborating and staying committed to the same mission, we believe we can attain our goal in maximising the students' capacity for English learning in the near future.

Chan Yee Lin Elaine EPC, T.K.D.S. Fong Shu Chuen School

PLP-R/W at Hoi Pa Street Government Primary School

In the past four years, our English team has taken the Primary Literacy Programme - Reading/Writing, also known as PLP-R/W, to the independent stage. The children love the variety of topics chosen. Over the years, the LETs, NET and teaching assistant (TA) at Hoi Pa Street Government Primary School have tailored the programme to better suit the school-based curriculum and students. We hold co-planning meetings once a fortnight for PLP-R/W. We conduct evaluation and reflection on our teaching strategies and materials, often adapting the teaching materials to cater for learner diversity.

In the classrooms, the LETs work in collaboration with the NET and the TA to conduct reading and writing lessons. These teaching partners play different roles in the lessons to facilitate students' learning. The teaching assistants assist the teachers and the NET in conducting guided reading and matching students to book levels, thus making it possible for the teachers to provide individual help for the students, particularly in the writing lessons.

We also conduct educational visits to enable students' learning outside school. We organise a P2 visit to the Hong Kong Science Museum every year on the unit of 'Magic Science Museum'. Additionally, throughout the year, there are parent workshops prepared by our NET and LETs to provide support for our parents with children in P1 or P2 in the teaching of high frequency words and shared writing.

Under the PLP-R/W programme, we work in collaboration with different stakeholders inside and outside school. To our delight, our students' reading and writing abilities have significantly improved. We are truly proud of our English team for its total commitment and hard work.

Sharon Yip EPC, Hoi Pa Street Government Primary School



SuRE and English Fun Time

New ways of learning have proved a hit at our school this year, showing learning English can be both challenging and fun. In its first year at our school, the Supported Reading in English Programme (SuRE) has provided students with the necessary scaffolding to help them develop into independent readers with an awareness of a variety of text types.

We have used The Queen's New Chef to introduce a number of new learning tools to enhance the reading skills of our P4 students, such as the parking lot, the prediction flow chart, the five-finger graphic organiser, the character map, the 3-2-1 exit card and the objective sheet.

All in all, the students have responded positively and enthusiastically. They have really enjoyed the new ways of learning and look forward to the SuRE lessons. They especially like using the parking lot to ask questions and to make comments. The new learning style is both a challenging and fun experience.

With the help of our AT, Ms. Kit Yong, and the resources provided by the NET Section, we have also launched the whole-week English Fun Time this year. This is an event to be held four times a year with interesting activities based on different festivals. The theme of the first English Fun Time was Halloween and it was a big hit with a lot of students taking part in the different activities in the English Room. The next Fun Time will be a celebration of Christmas.





Working Collaboratively with the NET

I have been teaching at Shek Lei Catholic Primary School since 2007. The year also marked my first experience of co-teaching with a NET - Miss Tania de Saram, who has worked at our school for eight years.

I am very lucky to have Miss Tania to work with because I have really learnt a lot from her. She is a very experienced and enthusiastic teacher. She always has awesome teaching ideas about learning, games and activities. As a result, our students love to attend her classes. We have lots of fun and laughter during our coteaching lessons.

Apart from teaching, she has done so much more, like helping the school to develop our school-based reading, writing and phonics programmes. She records dictation for our school websites and gives suggestions and demonstrations on choral and verse speaking. She is also helping to look after the special needs students and shares ways of catering to and helping the lower ability groups.

Miss Tania and I have worked together for over six years now. I think the key to successfully working collaboratively is working as a team. We always discuss, share and prepare lessons together. We really do co-teach and are both actively engaged in the lessons. It takes team effort to put together the best strategies!

I guess it is not easy for any school to retain their NETs, but our school has succeeded in keeping Miss Tania for over six years. Miss Tania is very sociable and approachable. She gets on well not just with the English teachers, but also other subject teachers, TAs and staff in the general office. At recess, students like to hug her because she always smiles and welcomes everyone to talk to her!

I thank the Lord for this special gift, the gift of a special friend and partner whom I deeply trust, respect and love.

Alice Leung EPC, Shek Lei Catholic Primary School

St Anthony's Primary School English Week October 2013

St Anthony's English Week began six years ago. The main aim of the activity is to encourage a wider use of English, especially outside the classroom environment. From the beginning, we have been collaborating with South Island School (SIS).

This year, students and teachers alike enjoyed an English-focused week in October. All students, from P1 to P6, were encouraged to 'Speak more English!' During this week, we also gave some secondary students from SIS a taste of the teaching experience. They were such a fantastic group of teenagers and proved to be very adaptable and energetic.





The week consisted of various activities and games designed for each level based on the theme 'Healthy Life'. The P4 students designed a house made of healthy food while the P6 students designed and played games to promote healthy activities. The P2 students had a pizza-making lesson which was very popular. As well as making a pizza, the students also created a lovely recipe book. The P3 students had fun creating their own board game about healthy life which involved practising their writing, reading and speaking skills. The students in P5 had the chance to express their creativity as well as their language skills when they redesigned some food packaging.

As for the P1 students, they had a great time with the SIS students who read Big Books to small groups and made a Healthy Tips poster. The SIS students did a great job and adapted quickly to the demands of helping students of varying abilities. They were always friendly and patient.

Mr. Paul Mallia from the NET Section has supported the two previous English Days since becoming our school's Advisory Teacher. He has willingly participated in activating the various activities alongside our school staff as well as the SIS students. It has been great to see so many children acting more confidently, talking more spontaneously and having fun at the same time while learning English.

We certainly look forward to another English week next year and shall count on the continued support of all of our wonderful partners.

Anne Findlay NET, St Anthony's School



EPC Vignettes (including an EPC-NET duologue)

The Forging of a Wonderful Partnership

Someone once said to me that a good NET must be hidden away like a treasure. I found that rather amusing because how could one hide our NET of eight years? As our NET, she demonstrated her wonderful resourcefulness and adventurous spirit. Never satisfied with in-house programmes, she would jump at every opportunity to break out from the school's confines. She has organised summer trips abroad and would come back with stories like driving in pitch darkness one snowy night in the wilderness of New Zealand or sharing haggis in Edinburgh.

For a number of years, her voice has sounded through the PA system, teaching students about telephone etiquette, correcting common errors and talking about interesting anecdotes. But the most memorable to us was how she groaned in frustration when she couldn't find someone to adjudicate for the various debating events she helped organise.

It's been a wonderful partnership forged by understanding, acceptance and the yearly Christmas panettone. Thank you Chris for everything you've done for the department.

Carrie Cheung EPC, Ying Wa Girls' School

This term, my EPC (Miss Grace
Lam) and I collaborated on introducing a
new classroom behaviour management system.
We worked together to develop a series of classroom
rules and a noise level chart for all P1-3 classes. We then
prepared a colour-coded chart, so that students could clearly
see the results of their own behaviour.

After preparing the materials, Miss Lam set a meeting for the school English teachers and NET to discuss and implement the new system. All of the teachers now cooperate to establish good behaviour patterns for our students.

The collaboration between the EPC and NET was positive and progressive. Great results all around!

Vaughn Hill NET, Sai Kung Central Lee Siu Yam Primary School

Students from our school come from different cultures and have different abilities, and this diversity has always made classroom management challenging. This year, Vaughn (my NET) has suggested great ideas on managing classroom behaviour. Through meetings, ideas were refined and now a unified system is used in all levels. Though the system is still new, I believe that with the continued positive collaboration with our NET, nothing is impossible.

Grace Lam
EPC, Sai Kung Central Lee Siu Yam
Primary School

New NET Vignettes

Welcome⁴

1r. Gavin

Primary new NET

PNET Induction 2013-14: Cluster Meeting on Oct 22nd 2013

This event was part of the PNET induction programme and took place approximately 6 weeks into the academic year to enable new NETs to share some of their initial experiences teaching in Hong Kong.

Unfortunately I missed out on the initial 2-day induction in August, which left me a little apprehensive as to what to expect in the third session. Upon arriving, it was clear that everyone was really friendly and welcoming – the advisory teachers running the session even formally introduced me to the rest of the group – a really nice touch.

The first activity was a presentation on process writing – it was done in an informal way with a great mix of power-point, videos of lessons and views/comments taken from the floor.

Afterwards we were split into groups depending on the curriculum our schools follow (PLP-R, PLP-R/W etc). I was in the "miscellaneous" group, which was (surprisingly) the largest. This part was the most interesting as we basically shared our experiences (good and ad).

The main thing that struck me can be summed up by the word diversity. There was huge diversity in the group in terms of the types of schools, the level of the students' English and the nature of our backgrounds.

Interestingly, some of the problems mentioned were conflicting – some said they were given too little guidance on what they should teach and others said their remit was far too rigid and therefore not allowing any creativity.

A mention here should go to Mr. Jeff Wall, the AT overseeing our group. I felt Jeff listened and didn't intervene too much (it was our sharing session after all), but when he did speak he really tried to offer practical solutions to our problems.

The final part of the day was a presentation on using an interactive whiteboard. I think it was an interesting topic seeing all the tricks a whiteboard could do. The message it sent to me was:

"The possibilities are endless if we are willing to experiment a little bit."

I think it can be applied to the whole job of being a PNET.

Secondary new NETs

Lost and Found

I am new and fresh to the NET Scheme as of 14 weeks ago. I interviewed with 4 schools in total and the one I finally settled on, or, like a lost dog, it settled on me, was Chi Lin Buddhist Secondary School in Diamond Hill.



I clearly remember taking the day off work and making my way around Hong Kong as I had two interviews that day. I got completely lost inside the walls of the zen gardens at the Chi Lin Nunnery. All I saw were lotus flowers and lily pads; definitely a lovely place, but surely this could not also be a location for a school. Luckily, I was rescued by the secretary with my calls of help and asking "Where do I go now? I am inside a garden? I am late for my interview!" She laughed and assured me that I was where I was supposed to be. She came to meet me and led me next-door to the secondary school.

Once inside the school, itself reminding me of an elongated pagoda, I had my interview. Since I was flying back to Canada exactly one week later, I was invited back to teach a group of students at the school on a Saturday morning, and was assessed by a group of 6 English teachers. After the mock teaching was over, I was escorted by the principal around the school to see the facilities. I said all the right things of course. Then we went on a walking tour of the Chi Lin gardens, the same ones that I had the pleasure of encountering once before in a haphazard state a few days prior. I must confess that I felt like I was on a date as we strolled through the gardens, our umbrellas swaying. We just talked about our families, the architecture of the buildings, the rocks, the waterfall, the bonsai trees, and the nunnery itself. Two magical moments were when the principal showed me the special rock which he would sit on in the garden, look back at the school and think about the grand plans he had for the school. The second was at the school when the principal showed me the special view from a window where he would look out and admire the mango tree throughout the seasons.

I look back on the unique experience I had and consider myself very lucky. I am getting more and more settled each day and with each event that passes, such as English week and soon the upcoming Speech Festival, I still feel a lot like a celebrity at the school. I am a novelty to the students actually. Overall, the teachers and the students have made me feel very welcomed and that has made all the difference. If ever I need a lift in my day, I do look out the window with the special view and know that I have come a long way since getting lost in the midst of a beautiful setting. Hopefully I will just keep enjoying the teaching, gaining better understanding of Buddhism and an overall appreciation of the life lessons I will gain from working at this school.

A Worthwhile Roller Coaster Ride

If ever the metaphor of riding a roller coaster could be so accurately used for anything other than the application process, interview, short-listing, and job offer of the Hong Kong EDB NET programme, I would be truly stunned! For me, it has been a 10 month, behemoth of a ride so far – and the price of admission...worth every single penny!

Philip Mannering NET, St. Peter's Secondary School, Aberdeen

Some Positive Changes upon Return

After an eight year break, I have returned to Hong Kong as a secondary NET. Over that time I can see two key positive changes that make my life as a NET much easier - the NET Regional Coordinators visiting new NETs, and the EDB being more supportive of schools adapting the curriculum to student needs. When I started 13 years ago, I was isolated at Mui Wo, Lantau Island in a band 5 school (now called band 3) and would have appreciated some support with some of the unusual things I was asked to do. So, while technically I'm not a new NET, I am teaching in a special school which is a new experience, and I am appreciative that a Regional Coordinator has been there to talk through some of the issues I am experiencing and provided much needed resources. The other positive change is that the EDB has become more flexible about adapting curriculum to support student needs. I am impressed by the number of NETs who have taken this on and written their own curriculum and willingly shared it with me. Overall my experience is that the environment is much more supportive for NETs.







A Hong Kong Collection for a New NET from Afar

Pork floss, Crocodile meat Temple incense, Hiu Kwong Street Hello Kitty, Cream bun Virgin Mary, Grandson Bamboo...dim sum, Silver dollar Police-car siren, Grandma hollah Golden dragon, Climbing stairs Blood sausage, Morning prayers Barbed wire, stainless steel Leather handbag, Patent heel Mahjong tiles, Plastic stools Correction fluid, Government schools Healthy Kwun Tong, Basketball hoops Love Thy Neighbour, Ice-cream scoops Dehumidifiers, Hungry ghosts Crucifixions, Porridge oats

Steven Hirst NET, Leung Shek Chee College





Trip to Xian

In April 2013, I was invited to join my school's trip into Xian, China. I'd never been on a school trip with my students before and thought it would be a great chance for me to get to know them better. Seeing Xian was something I was looking forward to as well, as it's one of the oldest cities in China and famous for being an eastern terminus of the Silk Road.

Departure date arrived. We said our goodbyes and set off on our trip. When we arrived at the airport, the students were very excited. For some, it was their first experience of air travel. They were happy taking photos and were being inquisitive.

Four hours later, we arrived at Xian Airport. After a huge dinner, we went back to the hotel and had our first meeting. We discussed the next day's plans, students' responsibilities and fire safety procedures. Students then went back to their rooms. They were allowed to stay up until 10:30pm before lights out.

The next morning after a buffet for breakfast, we set off for our first stop, a local primary school. We were greeted at



the entrance by the principal. She was very hospitable. We took part in a mass morning exercise with the local students. The event had a workout class type atmosphere because of the high energy of the students and the loud local disco music playing. The local students seemed very enthusiastic and had smiles on their faces. It was a great way to start the morning. After that, we joined an origami class. The class was very big with over 40 students who were very attentive and eager to learn.

Other places we visited included The Huaging Pool and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, both built in the Tang Dynasty. We also visited the Shaannxi History Museum, which houses over 300,000 items including paintings and pottery. We saw the bell tower of Xian at night, which is a symbolic structure of the city. And finally, we visited the Mausoleum of the first Qin Emperor, which holds the Terracotta Army.

The students really enjoyed the trip, learned about Chinese culture and were able to practise their English. They were sad to leave. They had fun and enjoyed having the freedom of their own hotel rooms.

I'm glad to have taken part in this trip. It was a wonderful experience. I was able to spend time with and get to know my students outside the classroom as well as see a historically important part of China.

> Calvin Wong NET, Po Leung Kuk Mrs Chan Nam Chong Memorial Primary School



OUR NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor-in-chief: Teresa Chu

Team Members: Kay Beadman, Garlanda Kwan, Phillip Weber, Sterling Wu, Christine Xavier, Kit Yong

This Newsletter is prepared by the NET Section, CDI, EDB. All comments and suggestions on the Newsletter can be sent to



teresachu@edb.gov.hk