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Keeping Stakeholders Informed



The earthquake that hit Japan in March 2011 has certainly jolted the world from its slumber, sending tidal waves of thoughts that beg us to re-examine the ways we live, the choices we make, and the directions we are heading, especially regarding the use of nuclear energy. While radiation might be leaking into the air, the soil and the sea, there is also the release of positive energies through honest reflections which promise solution and salvation. Thus, when nuclear energy fails to provide, we see finer human qualities that give people the drive and the means to survive, qualities often nurtured by education.

Now at the end of another academic year, our readers would do well too to reflect on their own learning and teaching experiences so as to gain further insights for the coming year. We have therefore chosen “Reflections” as the theme for this issue and are happy to share with our readers a small collection of reflective journals written by a local student, some of our NETs, and a colleague of the NET Section. From this collection of reflective journals comes a statement which beautifully illustrates, like a rainbow, the power of reflections. Reflective journaling, according to Mr. Craig Downie (NET), “has been proven to be extremely effective, helping teachers to become more enlightened and gain a deeper understanding of where they have been, where they are now and where they are going (or should go)”.

Indeed, when reading through the reflections contained in this issue, we are constantly reminded that education of our students can only be achieved with the concerted effort of all, from the principals and teachers to the students, parents and the wider community. We are also made more aware of the need to cater for learner diversity so that the great potential entrapped in this diversity can be untapped and fully unearthed. From the introduction of adorable and gentle animals as special guests in the classroom to the integration of workplace and sports communication with the learning of English, we can see that our ingenious teachers have cleverly embraced learner diversity as opportunities for creativity, for excitement, for fun, culminating in ‘the lighting of a fire’.

For many of our readers, healthier and happier living includes a vacation, especially a well-deserved one at the end of the academic year. The article ‘Easter in New Zealand’ should further entice our teachers to embark on journeys that broaden not only their own horizons but also those of their students as they come back with stories to share. We wish our hardworking teachers and students a bright summer vacation and hope to see them return, even brighter and stronger, and with plenty more to share.

The NET Section too is constantly reflecting on current practices to ensure they truly cater for the ever-changing demands of the 21st century classroom. The NET Deployment Guidelines for primary schools, for instance, are going to be slightly revised to accommodate the changing needs of our schools and to reflect on the development of the schools and their NETs as well as the development of their literacy programmes at KS2. A letter has been sent to all principals advising that from the 2011/12 school year on, NETs in primary schools can be “deployed in KS1 and/or KS2”.

To Japan and her people and animals, we wish them the very best. To all of us in Hong Kong, we wish our blessings would continue as we continue to count our blessings, through humble, honest day-to-day reflections.

Rosana Chong

Rosana CHONG
Chief Curriculum Development Officer

Primary corner

Reflective teaching

It would be fair to say that most teachers would ask themselves, from time to time, the big question, “Am I an effective teacher?”

It is a very natural thing for people to reflect on their effectiveness... their effectiveness as a parent, their effectiveness as a partner, their effectiveness as a friend. So it's a natural urge for teachers to reflect on their effectiveness as educators.

When I first started teaching many years ago, it was encouraged and quite normal for beginning teachers to keep a teaching journal. These journals had the dual role of giving a practical connection between teaching theories learnt during teacher training and lessons taught, as well as serving as a strategy to engage in a critical reflective analysis of our day-to-day teaching.

What usually happens after a few years is most teachers give up the teaching journals due to increased work loads, pressure of time and greater confidence that tells us we don't need such arbitrary processes any more.

This is a real shame as journaling one's teaching, either day to day or in a periodic fashion, has been proven to be extremely effective, helping teachers to become more enlightened and gain a deeper understanding of where they have been, where they are now and where they are going (or should go).

So what practical strategies, besides journaling, can we as teachers use to help us become more reflective in our teaching?

Many teachers report varying degrees of success with audio-visual recordings of their lessons, collecting relevant data and surveys, or engaging in peer talk, which is very pertinent here in H.K. as many PNETs co-teach with their local colleagues, so have the luxury of a “sounding board”.

One must also not forget to include the major stakeholders in this whole process... the students themselves. Students are usually more than willing to tell you exactly the way it is, with no beating around the bush. You can get some amazing insights into the effectiveness of your teaching (and ways of improving your effectiveness) if you take the time to ask, listen and reflect on your students' responses.

I love to give out a very quick questionnaire to my students at the end of each learning cycle.

It simply asks: “Mr. Downie is a good teacher because...” as well as “Mr. Downie would be a better teacher if...”

I look forward to the constructive feedback my students would give me. And it also acts as a catalysis for the on-going reflective evaluation of my teaching and planning.

As a funny anecdote, I still remember what one P6 student wrote on her questionnaire:

“Mr. Downie would be a better teacher if... he wore proper shoes and not his Nike runners every day.”

Whatever methods you use, remember that Reflective Teaching is intrinsically tied up with your core beliefs of teaching and with how you think students best learn. Use it to challenge these beliefs and don't be afraid to change and make paradigm shifts... it is what makes teaching so interesting and dynamic.

by Craig Downie (NET),
Lau Tak Yung Memorial Primary School



Fostering a positive attitude towards learning

Times are changing. Gone are the days when a child's grades and class position were of paramount importance. Or so I thought. I recently had the enlightening experience of holding a parents' workshop in school, where the bleak reality hit me: some attitudes still need improving, and fast.

Let me set the scene. What should have been a valuable time for bonding between mother and son, as they jointly constructed a paper plate mask, soon degenerated into an opportunity for the parent to criticise her child for his lack of 'perfection'. She then compounded the boy's humiliation by comparing him unfavourably with the student next to him.

Suffice to say, it all ended, quite literally, in tears. The boy threw down his pencil and began to cry, totally demoralized, his original enthusiasm extinguished. I couldn't help but wonder about the long term effects of such an experience, especially when it is so common at home, behind closed doors. I'm sure many of you have encountered this situation in the classroom, or have even been victims of imposed perfectionism yourselves.

Here's my suggestion. Let's all make a concerted effort as educators to set the right example. Let's celebrate the joy of learning, respect and delight in our individual differences, and dispense with this ridiculous ideal of perfection that, realistically, we can never achieve. Let's cater to learner diversity and work at fostering a safe, secure environment for learning - a nourishing, supportive environment where children enjoy learning and exploring at their own pace. Childhood is supposed to be a happy, carefree time in life. Let's keep it that way. There will be plenty of time later on for growing up.

‘Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.’
(William Butler Yeats)

by Tania Marie de Saram (NET),
Shek Lei Catholic Primary School



The Fun Bus by Jill Eggleton (the play)

“YES! I love that story”, I thought to myself, after last year’s ‘Reader’s Theatre’ workshop at the NET Section office. “It’s funny, short and easy.”

An experienced Chinese drama teacher, Jess, suggested that it would be good for the school to enter the Hong Kong Drama Festival with The Fun Bus.

At first I wasn’t too sure. However, writing the script was easy. It only asked for limited adaptation and it was finished in one evening. On top of that, some of the SEN students showed unexpected and promising gifts. I began to believe that it could be done. I put it to the English Panel, who agreed that it would be good to try.

Meanwhile, I wrote to the publisher to get permission for performing the play. This took about two and a half months, but came through in the end. We started by reading the book and doing some improvisations. The main characters were cast straight away, or rather, they cast themselves.

It happened like this: I gave all students a copy of one of the picture pages of the storybook, to see which character they fancied playing. Two weeks later, everybody had given themselves a role. We made up some parts as well. Immediately, we started some character work through improvisations.

Having entered the Drama Festival, we needed to divide up the tasks. In my school, there are many activities, so finding people who

are available to help isn’t easy. Nevertheless, the parents made three fantastic birds, interpreting and superseding my original design. They also made a brilliant job of the make-up. The props and the scenery were my jobs.

Wendy, my SET, wrote a worksheet for the audience as a follow-up English activity to watching the play. My Principal, Mr Au, had banners made of my background designs, painted on the computer using Photoshop. It took a long time, but they were finished just in time.

The last month’s rehearsals were very difficult. The Friday before the performance, the run lasted an hour. Oh boy!!! And it was only supposed to be 15-20 minutes.

The big day came, 2nd of March. Adrenalin finally started to flow through the veins of my actors and did its trick... Nerves gave them so much oomf, that the whole thing only lasted 13 minutes. I was so proud of my little cast.

by Josee Colley (NET),
Leung Lee Sau Yu Memorial Primary School



Secondary corner

Stepping Out With Rugby

In 2007/08, Chun Tok Secondary School took up an offer made by Robbie McRobbie, head of Rugby Services at a NESTA Professional Development day to coach students.

Over the next three years, training claimed 6 weeks of activity time in a year’s school timetable for English through Sports Communication. The Hong Kong Rugby Football Union (HKRFU) provided the English through Rugby programme used in the UK.

The school added its own activities such as learning names of countries involved in HK Sevens, finding them on a globe, describing their flags and learning the language associated with international sport generally.

In the sixth week, the school held its own Sevens tournament so that students could show the skills learnt and students attended the Friday night of the Sevens competition.

In the 2009/10 project, a rugby player employed as a TA for English and PE taught rugby in his PE classes and the HKRFU repeated the same 6-week training programme they had the previous year. The Lutheran School for the Deaf and players from the HK Sevens team joined Chun Tok Secondary School in the school’s Sevens tournament.

The language focus was on advertising and media that were linked to the East Asian Games. As a culmination to the module of work, an inter-school match between Chun Tok Secondary School and the Lutheran School for the Deaf was played as a curtain-raiser to the rugby final at the East Asian Games.

2010/11 has proved to be a very successful year for Chun Tok Secondary School. The school integrated rugby with their Learning English through Workplace and Sports Communication units with individual programmes for students doing different tasks from January to March. Generally, the lower school (forms 1 and 2 and lower 3) ran the business of making and selling food and drinks on tournament day. The middle school (forms upper 3 and 4) were in charge of event management and were responsible for areas such as finance, stadium layout and set up, advertising and public relations, and liaising with people from HKRFU, volunteers from the Standard Chartered Bank, teachers and other students. The upper school (F5) had roles related to organising the 5-week training sessions, team management and rosters. One team within this group was responsible for making the promotional video.

The tournament itself was held at King’s Park. All English teachers and the Technology and Living teachers were involved in the workplace units of event management, sports management or catering. The HKRFU once again gave full support and found a sponsor for the endeavour. Some students were allowed to visit the HKRFU headquarters to interview staff about their jobs while Standard Chartered Bank provided sponsorship and volunteers to come along on 16 March 2011 to play, work as linesmen and assistants to the teams.

It was the first ever deaf rugby sevens tournament, the Standard Chartered Chun Tok Sevens 2011. Chun Tok Secondary School hosted the event and their guests from the Lutheran School for the Deaf competed in eight matches, culminating in a very special All Star Match in which the Star Students Team beat the Hong Kong Rugby Stars Team, made up of teachers, coaches, volunteers from Standard Chartered Bank, and some members of the Hong Kong national rugby team.

On March 24, the team played a curtain raiser for the final of the Tens at Hong Kong Football Club.

This truly has been another example of a school’s triumphing over learner diversity by catering for individual differences. Through this experience, some students have become real rugby fans and most have valued the experience as a ‘real’ English learning experience. The NET, Chris Morrison, said upon reflection that the project had opened up the world of many of her hearing-impaired students. ‘The students’ slogan was *Stepping out with Rugby* and many have done just that through this project,’ she said.

Jolanta Anna Karczewski (RNC)



Stellar Moments at Methodist College

As a part of the current module about dogs in the Stellar Programme, Form 2 students were paid an unforgettable visit on March 25th, by two special guests who effortlessly showed us the fun and joy of keeping pets.

Miss Richardson's two Canadian bred Shih Tzus, 6-year-old mother Duchess and her 4-year-old daughter Princess, accompanied by their nanny, Miss Ria, were an unexpected, yet very pleasant and heart-melting surprise for us. Through learning about the two lapdogs and their contagious care-free and playful nature, through seeing their collection of toys and accessories and having the opportunity to approach and play with them ourselves, many of us have overcome our fear of dogs and developed an interest in these adorable and gentle animals, not only in the Stellar lessons but eventually throughout the entire school.

Besides boosting our enthusiasm for animals and highlighting the need to care for them, this unique opportunity was also a large step outside the solid frame of conventional teaching. It has given us a wonderful experience and two new friends we all look forward to seeing again.

by Zhi Liang Fang (Student),
Methodist College



Healthier & Happier Living Easter in New Zealand

Easter in New Zealand with thirty P5 and P6 students and three teachers was a real adventure! Home sickness, travel sickness, Easter egg hunts and rafting - everything was exciting and new!

We spent four days at Waikato Diocesan School for Girls. The girls did English lessons in the morning and visited places around Hamilton in the afternoon. They had opportunities to meet and interact with New Zealand students during these days. Our trip to Raglan, with its wide, black sand beach and amazing surf, was always a high-light as it was so different from Hong Kong beaches and the girls expended a lot of energy in simple pleasures, running along the sand, exploring the rock pools and building sandcastles.

On Good Friday we visited Rotorua to see the geothermal area and the Agrodome before heading down to National Park in the central North Island for four days of outdoor adventure.

Abseiling, team games, caving, rafting, canoeing, high ropes and mountain walking were all activities provided by the Blue Mountain Adventure Centre and the girls really gained confidence as they overcame their fears and accomplished each activity.

This is the sixth year Sacred Heart Canossian School has run a New Zealand trip. As a NET, organizing and leading this kind of trip is one of the highlights of my job! It is always a real privilege to share my country and culture with my students and colleagues and to know that their horizons are broadened and lives enriched by the experience.

by Anne Macpherson (NET),
Sacred Heart Canossian School



Go surf; Go search

"Never lose an opportunity to see anything that is beautiful. It is God's handwriting - a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

To get in touch with nature is one way to stay happy and healthy. Opening up ourselves to the simple pleasures of observing nature and appreciating the beauty and grace of all creatures big and small will certainly bring joy and peace to our lives.

Hong Kong, though a small city, does offer an abundance of life, some of which can be tracked through these links on the right. Have a beautiful summer, and be delighted by God's handwriting.

Hong Kong Park

www.lcsd.gov.hk/parks/hkp/en/watching.php

Hong Kong Wetland Park

www.wetlandpark.com

Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens

www.lcsd.gov.hk/leisure/LP/hkzbg

Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG)

www.kfbg.org.hk

Ocean Park

www.oceanpark.com.hk

SPCA HK

www.sPCA.org.hk

Tai Tong Lychee Valley

www.yl.hk/taitong

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