Primary Literacy Programmes

Primary Literacy Programme – Reading (Key Stage 1) [PLP-R (KS1)]

"PLP-R (KS1) is a very effective programme in arousing students’ interest and confidence in reading. We are happy to see young students picking up English books in the library and some of them trying to sound out the words during independent reading. Thanks for the effort and support from the NET Section."

Comments from a PLP-R (KS1) teacher

The English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6) (ELCG) published in 2004 and prepared by the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council (CDC) recommended including a Reading Workshop component for 40% of the English lesson time in the school-based English Language curriculum. As a response to the above recommendation, the Primary Literacy Programme – Reading (Key Stage 1) [PLP-R (KS1)] was born.

The PLP-R (KS1) was developed by the Advisory Teaching Team (ATT) of the NET Section, Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), Education Bureau (EBD), Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It harnessed the expertise and experience available in the Primary Native-speaking English Teacher (PNET) Scheme to support the development of a school’s Reading Workshop component as part of the school-based English Language programme. It provided direction and guidance for the teaching of literacy with a focus on reading as well as the tools necessary for the assessment of student needs and the knowledge of how they read. It supported setting up supportive language-rich whole-school and classroom environments and establishing classroom and resource management systems. It promoted the use of Storytelling, Reading Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading and Independent Reading as teaching strategies for reading by teachers.

The two-year pilot PLP-R (KS1) began in September 2004 in 104 schools. The aims of the programme were two-fold. On the one hand, we wanted to enhance the reading proficiency of students through a sustainable literacy programme with a focus on reading. On the other hand, we supported English teachers with intensive professional development linked to the curriculum. We began with Key Stage 1 students in order to capitalise on the students' enthusiasm and motivation when they began formal schooling and helped them develop positive learning habits and establish basic literacy skills at an early stage for future learning. The programme also provided teachers with direction and guidance for the teaching of literacy with a focus on reading as well as the tools necessary for the assessment of student needs and the knowledge of how they read.
The PLP-R (KS1) was implemented through the on-site support of Advisory Teachers (ATs). ATs made frequent visits to the participating schools to provide support in terms of centralised and school-based professional development workshops, classroom observations focusing on modelling and feedback for the teachers involved in the programme.

The PLP-R (KS1) was also fully supported with resources developed for teachers. The Teacher Manual explained how the programme should be implemented. The Units of Work, including the phonological awareness unit (Hear We Go), Home Reading Booklet, Matching Students to Book Levels Kit and Resource Packages provided support for its implementation. These programme materials were introduced to teachers through a series of centralised and school-based professional development workshops.

Impact of the PLP-R (KS1) on student learning

From 2004 to 2006, the Territory-wide Evaluation (TWE) on the PNET Scheme had been conducted by the University of Melbourne, the Open University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Griffin, 2006). Part of the research focuses was on the PLP-R (KS1).

The data from the TWE confirmed that “shared reading…led to greater growth in reading and writing over the three years.” This result was supported by another study conducted by Elley in 1992 in Singapore “which has adopted shared reading nationally…where children learning to read in their second language produced mean scores that were well above the international averages” (Smith and Elley, 1997). The same findings were mirrored by research in Sri Lanka reported by Elley and Foster in 1996, in South African by Le Roux and Schollar in 1996 underprivileged schools and in Brunei Darrusallam by Ng and Larking in 1994 (Smith and Elley, 1997).

The above research showed that students were gaining skills in word recognition, oral language, reading and inferential comprehension, and vocabulary at an increased rate if they were “led to interact with them (the books) actively, as in shared reading…” (Elley and Foster, 1996 in Smith and Elley, 1997). The Territory-wide Evaluation of the PNET Scheme made comparison of gains in students’ reading proficiency in PLP-R (KS1) versus non-PLP-R schools. The results indicated positive trends for students in PLP-R (KS1) schools in terms of reading and writing proficiency. Observations also indicated changes to classroom practices for schools participating in the programme.
This confirms not only that shared reading is effective in second language acquisition, but also that shared reading has been effective in Hong Kong context in the PLP-R (KS1) over the past three years.

As a testament to the success of the pilot, an invitation was issued to the non-PLP-R schools to be part of the PLP-R (KS1) in 2006 and 67 schools were accepted as part of the new cohort of PLP-R (KS1) schools. To date, 1,910 primary teachers have been trained and the Programme has involved a total of 40,267 students.

**Primary Literacy Programme – Reading and Writing (Key Stage 1) [PLP-R/W (KS1)]**

The NET Section decided to refine and review the PLP-R (KS1) to incorporate some of the above suggestions through developing the Primary Literacy Programme – Reading and Writing (Key Stage 1) [PLP-R/W (KS1)] in 2007. It was decided to adopt a holistic approach incorporating the four skills to the primary literacy programme, but still have an emphasis on reading and writing. The decision was made not only to continue with shared reading as the main teaching strategy, but also include the other teaching strategies.

The ELCG was the basis for the direction in the teaching of writing skills. This facilitated the use of shared writing as the main teaching strategy, but underpinning this was the process of writing, which was explicitly introduced.

The TWE report also indicated an “over reliance on textbooks” in the English classroom. During the implementation of the PLP-R (KS1), it was clear that integration was the biggest problem. Teachers were not able to integrate the General English (GE) lessons which focused mainly on the use of textbook materials, with the PLP-R (KS1) lessons. The pilot PLP-R/W (KS1) allows for integration between the PLP-R/W (KS1) and the textbook resources. For this reason the NET Section produced the big and small books and facilitated the integration. These books have also been written with the local context in mind. Similar to the PLP-R (KS1), intensive support is given through professional development workshops, followed by in-class support through weekly visits by the ATs and the development of a range of materials and resources.
“Students can write more now. They are no longer scared of writing. All the students want to try to participate…willing to take risks.”

Observations from a PLP-R/W (KS1) teacher

The PLP-R/W (KS1) is currently being implemented in a total of 170 schools involving 1,402 teachers and 33,642 students.

Impact of the Literacy Programmes on teachers

Both PLP-R (KS1) and PLP-R/W (KS1) initiated by the NET Section place heavy emphasis on professional development and aim at equipping teachers with a wider repertoire of teaching strategies. As effective classroom practises are not sustainable unless teachers understand the rationale behind the programme design, collecting teachers’ feedback on the implementation of PLP-R (KS1) and PLP-R/W (KS1) is necessary.

As part of the on-going evaluation of both PLP-R (KS1) and PLP-R/W (KS1), teachers have been asked for their input through questionnaires and focus group discussions. When asked about the sustainability of the programmes, over 90% of teachers currently involved in PLP-R (KS1) and PLP-R/W (KS1) responded that they would maintain the programmes even if all support was removed. This is a reflection of the effectiveness of the programmes and the value the schools place on the two initiatives.

“The PLP-R/W (KS1) is a well-worth experience for students”
“The presenters were patient, discussing in detail and giving practical demonstration of one of the sessions.”

Comments from PLP-R/W (KS1) teachers
**Seed Project: Supporting Students with Lower Socio-economic Status (LSES)**

Griffin et al. (2006) in the TWE found that the PLP-R (KS1) was particularly beneficial for low socio-economic groups.

“Students from less enriched home backgrounds (in terms of access to books) who were also taking part in the PLP-R (KS1) showed a much stronger rate of growth in reading proficiency than their counterparts who were not taking part in the PLP-R (KS1)...The PLP-R (KS1) was linked to most difference for those students who were most in need of support for their reading, and who did not have access to books in any other context than the school and classroom” (Griffin, 2006).

It was this finding that prompted the development of a two-year joint venture between the NET Section and three project schools situated in Cheung Sha Wan, Kwai Chung and Sham Shui Po, with intake of students with lower socio-economic status starting in September 2009. The aim of this Seed project is to explore how to provide parents with strategies to support children’s learning of English at home. In order to achieve this aim, monthly workshops and training sessions have been developed and delivered to interested parents so they were given a “taste” of what was happening during the PLP-R/W (KS1) lessons and introduced to interesting and motivating activities to reinforce their children’s learning at home.

Apart from parental involvement, the three Seed schools are also working towards the development of a school-based curriculum that integrates components such as parental support, buddy reading, enriched online support and field trips that link up what students’ learning experiences in the English lessons to real life experiences in excursions. For instance, students were taken to the Science Museum before they read a story about a “Magic Science Museum” to provide an authentic learning experience.

Preliminary findings about the impact of this project indicate that there are strong correlations between the parents’ involvement in the parent workshops and training with the progress in their children’s reading levels.
Seed Project: Key Stage 2 Integration Programme (KIP)

The three-year Seed Project KIP starting in September 2009 is a timely response to the success of the PLP-R and PLP-R/W and schools’ increasing use of formative and summative assessment data to understand their students’ learning needs. It is designed to support:

(a) PLP-R (KS1) schools so they can continue the comprehensive and innovative literacy experiences for their students; and

(b) non-PLP-R schools which would like to participate in the NET Section’s literacy programmes.

Upon proceeding to Key Stage 2, students may have had either a limited or more extensive exposure to a range of language experiences and innovative learning opportunities. A literary approach in KS2 ideally builds on and reinforces the prior knowledge and skills they have accumulated in KS1 and incorporates innovative teaching strategies that support and extend students’ development capacities.

KIP commences in P4 with an introduction to (for non-PLP-R schools) or continuation of (for current PLP-R schools) shared reading and guided reading. This reading foundation serves as a springboard for students to further engage in authentic writing, speaking and listening experiences. Writing workshops, through shared writing, cooperative learning, shared reading and guided reading, and allow students and teachers to engage in a range of learning and teaching opportunities. This develops self-managed writing skills in students that prepare them to become independent, effective writers in readiness for the challenge in Key Stage 3.

There are, at present, 19 schools implementing the Programme involving 85 teachers and 3,335 students.

“It’s really a great extension and bridging (programme) to the PLP-R.”

Comment from a KIP teacher
Hong Kong has always prided itself on being a multi-racial society. To maintain the harmony that already exists, it is vital that we continue to provide all students with the best possible education and teach them sound language skills so that open communication is always possible. To do this successfully, we need to cater for the increasing numbers of ethnic students.

Many local schools have recently seen significant increase in the number of students whose mother tongue is not Chinese. While some of these non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students are quite fluent in English, others require targeted help in order to improve their English literacy levels.

This is the basis of the three-year Seed project starting in September 2009. It involves teachers from 6 project schools working closely with the NET Section’s Advisory Teaching Team to develop a school-based English Language curriculum that meets the learning needs of NCS students in each of the schools. The project team, comprising of experienced Advisory Teachers (ATs) and Seconded Teachers, develop and try out resources that can improve the education of NCS students throughout Hong Kong.

Since 2004, the NET Section has developed the comprehensive Primary Literacy Programmes in Reading [PLP-R (KS1)] and subsequently in Reading and Writing [PLP-R/W (KS1)] which are now being used extensively throughout Hong Kong. The new NCS Seed Project hopes to emulate that process, using the sound foundations of the PLP-R/W which will be adapted and modified for NCS students in KS1. In KS2, units of work, materials and resources are being developed and trialled in collaboration with the Seconded Teacher from one of the Seed Schools.

The NCS Seed Project has grown from an obvious need to providing a more relevant, interesting and culturally-aware educational environment for these ethnic minority groups. It is hoped that these students will complete their secondary education in Hong Kong, continue onto tertiary institutions and contribute towards creating a balanced and harmonious multi-cultural society.
References

Curriculum Development Council. (2004). *English Language Education Key Learning Area English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6)*. Hong Kong: HKSARG
