

2. Canossa Primary School

Introduction

Students in Canossa Primary School have developed strong reading interest; students love to visit the school library during recess and lunch breaks. The school has introduced a number of reading schemes to promote students' development of reading habit. The activity has demonstrated wide popularity as students and their parents are eager to join. The Head of School, Mr W.K. To, understands that the development of the school library is a critical element in reading promotion. Apart from allocating resources to the school library to serve as a foundation that can support future development, he acts as a role model in stimulating students' reading interest by leading the monthly activity "The Head of School tells a story" – a fun-filled story-sharing activity at lunch break. A well-developed school library not only promotes reading among students, but also supports student learning. The following describes various successful factors for facilitating school library work, as well as how the school library can foster a strong reading culture. These include:

- Management of the school library
- Various reading schemes
- Collaboration between the teacher and the teacher-librarian in teaching activities to support students' learning
- Cultivation of moral development for students through reading and various library activities.

Library as a Learning Centre

To promote reading, the school library provides an attractive environment to encourage students to visit.

The Environment

The library at Canossa Primary School is an attractive place for children. The library is carefully designed to be a cosy environment with a colourful and lively setup. There are many different pictures, photographs, dolls and potted plants for embellishment, thus a unique style is created. To cater for students who have not yet developed their reading interest, the school library has a "Toy Cabinet" to provide them with spelling and puzzle games, for example, UNO. The teacher-librarian, Ms Luk, believes that some students visit the library because they are attracted by the toys and games. She thinks that it is crucial to attract students to visit the school library first, and to develop their interest in reading gradually. The school library and the "Toy Cabinet" also enable students who do not have siblings to play with other students of similar age and develop their interpersonal skills.





As a learning centre, the library provides reading materials for motivating students' interests. These include picture-books, storybooks, informative reading materials and even educational comic books such as "Doraemon". The wide range of reading materials attracts students and also provides support for the school curriculum.

Customised Cataloging

The teacher-librarian supplements the common Dewey Decimal Classification with a custom-built colour-coding system to facilitate students in locating the library materials they need. The system sub-classifies different types of books, such as "Mathematics" or "Animals" by labeling them with colour labels in order to help students to locate their desired books more easily. Such an arrangement is appropriate for primary school students because lower primary school students might not have the skills in identifying and classifying different genre of reading materials. These "school-based" sub-classification labels enable children to locate their desired books more quickly.



Learning Resources

The school library provides 6 computers for students to access online self-learning resources and use learning software, such as games from the Hong Kong Education City. The school library also provides tape recorders and various learning audio materials including "Listen to English Stories", "Learning Mandarin" and "Religious Stories" etc., to support student learning.

The Establishment of Reading Culture

In addition to having good books and hardware facilities, the library offers various reading schemes to foster the school's reading culture.

Reading Star Scheme and Class Reading Stars

The school library has launched reading schemes such as the Reading Star Scheme and Class Reading Stars to encourage students to read. There are monthly prizes for each scheme. The student who reads the most in each class is the "Class Reading Star" and is invited to participate in "The Head of School tells a story", which is a very popular activity which is held monthly during lunch break on Wednesdays. The activity is popular among



students because the stories told by the School Head are interesting and engaging. The School Head's participation in reading schemes strengthens the momentum for nurturing a reading culture in the school and promotes reading among teachers and students.

Students who borrow over 80 books a year will receive a Gold award for the "Fun Reading Journey". In 2010, 98 students achieved this prize. Parents believe that these schemes can encourage students to read.

"The school offers award schemes to encourage students to read and students are willing to participate. When my children do not have to go to school, they often say, 'Mom, I want to visit the library'. They also tell me what kinds of books that they like to read. I have consulted the social workers and they told me that it does not matter even though they read comic books in the library instead of textbooks. They considered that it was not a problem to start reading with comic books as the key is to develop children's interest in reading."

- Parent of Primary 4 student K.Y. Ng

"Parents as Reading Companion" Scheme

To promote learning, it is insufficient to rely solely on the school's resources. Therefore, the school has solicited parental support. The school will invite parent volunteers to read story books to groups of about 20 students and act as their reading companions on every Friday lunch break. Six to seven parent volunteers also serve as reading companions each week. Students in each class take part in the "Reading Companion" scheme. There were 19 parents participating in the scheme in this school year and some have already accumulated seven years' experience as reading companions. Ms Luk organises annual workshops to share storytelling skills with newly-joined parent volunteers. The parent volunteers will also divide up their workload to tell stories in Cantonese, English or Mandarin. Apart from arousing students' interest in reading, the scheme also widens students' exposure to English, Chinese and Putonghua.



The parents interviewed said that they joined the reading companion scheme because they would like to understand and contribute to the school and at the same time help students learn. After serving as parent volunteers, they have more to share at home with their children, and the parent-child relationship has been improved.

"In the beginning, my elder daughter didn't have much interest in reading and she did not borrow enough books to get a prize. However, after she has developed interest in reading, she starts to pursue the target and wishes to surmount the target. My daughter told me, 'Mom, I love reading'. And I said to her, 'Don't worry, feel free to borrow books to read, but you have to finish your homework first'. In this way, I teach my kids if they want to read, they have to finish the homework first. With this kind of habit, they can also learn time management skills at the same time."

- Parent of a Primary 4 student S.S. Lam

To express the school's gratitude to the parents, Ms Luk issues library cards to them. The school library also offers suitable books for parents to read, such as books relating to the growth of children. Priority will be provided to parent volunteers who want to participate in workshops organised by the school library.

In addition to the regular activities, Ms Luk also arranges parent-child reading workshops. These workshops are usually held after school on Fridays or during weekends to cater for working parents that cannot spend time to read with their children. If there are extra funds, Ms Luk will invite professional storytellers like Auntie Choi and Alvin Cheng to visit the school. Every year, Ms Luk organises a range of workshops to promote parent-child reading and theme-based reading through games.

Senior Peer Reading Companion Scheme

Primary school-aged students are easily influenced by their senior peers. The school library therefore launched the senior peer reading companion scheme. Teachers appoint senior class students who excel academically to serve as reading companions. The teacher-librarian and language teachers then teach them the skills and appropriate attitude for serving as reading companions. Junior class students with relatively weaker reading abilities are selected by the class teachers to participate in the reading companion scheme. Students will read under the accompany of senior reading companions in order to improve their reading skills.

Supporting Student Learning

Apart from nurturing students' interest in reading and supporting learning through reading, the school library also helps develop students' learning abilities.

Design of Teaching Materials

The textbook "Fun Reading Journey", used by the school library, was designed and edited by the teacher-librarian. This set of teaching materials has evolved from a common booklet used for all grades, to a specialized set of booklets for each grade. Apart from tracking students' reading records, the booklet also contains teaching materials and exercises for the Library class, and reading report worksheets for other subjects. The teacher-librarian marks the exercises related to the Library class, while the reading reports for other subjects are marked by the respective subject teachers. Ms Luk believes that self-prepared teaching materials allow the teaching schedule to



be more flexibly managed. There is too much information in some textbooks designed for the Library class available in the market and cannot fit into the teaching schedule. This may not be beneficial to the development of students' learning.

Support Inquiry-based Project Learning – the Cultivation of Information Literacy

The teacher-librarian is responsible for cultivating information literacy at the school. The curriculum of information literacy covers basic classification of books, in-depth reading strategies, media education, speed reading and summarising skills. Students found the contents of this programme highly practical.

“During the Library class, Ms Luk teaches us easier ways to search for books. Before learning how to make use of the call number of the books, we had to turn the school library ‘upside down’ in order to find a book. After learning about the call number, we know how to narrow down the search area.”

- Primary 5 Student W.Y. Tse

Canossa Primary School is currently collaborating with the Faculty of Education of the University of Hong Kong to promote the use of Web 2.0 tools for supporting inquiry-based project learning. Collaborating with other subject panels, Ms Luk teaches students effective searching skills with the use of the Boolean operators “AND”, “OR” and “NOT” as well as news database such as WiseNews. These topics greatly benefit students’ learning.

Enhancing Writing Skill & Extracurricular Knowledge

Reading improves writing skills, and therefore Canossa Primary School requests all students to engage in project learning, which requires them to visit the school library to search for information. All parents interviewed pointed out that searching for information from the library to complete projects has helped students improve their writing skills and broaden their general knowledge

“Students need to collect information from the library while working on school projects. Through reading more books, their compositions can be enriched with fuller content and more vivid adjectives. Although project learning takes much time, students benefit by acquiring knowledge not bounded by textbooks.”

- Parent of a Primary 4 Student K.Y. Ng

Collaboration with Subject Panels

The teacher-librarian, Ms Luk, has close collaboration with subject panels to support teaching and learning. For example, when the General Studies subject panel plans for project learning, Ms Luk first explores the contents of the project and identifies the relevant books required.. She then uses the block loan service of the Hong Kong Public Libraries to borrow the books and places them in a specific place on the library shelves. For example, the Primary Four project topic - is “The History of Hong Kong”. Ms Luk further sub-classified the relevant books for the convenience of students doing their research. Ms Luk also teaches students Internet searching skills and reminds them to respect intellectual property rights when they quote information from the sources. When Primary Five students need to use the online collaborative platform, Google Sites, to complete a project, Ms Luk collaborates with the Computer subject teacher to avoid any overlapping of the curriculum contents.

After discussion, the Computer teacher teaches students how to use the features of Google Sites, while Ms Luk focuses on teaching Internet searching skills and media education, etc.

All teachers in the school agree that the library has played an important role in promoting information literacy.

“The teacher-librarian plays the role of a resource facilitator to support teaching and learning and is an important asset of the school. If students can make good use of this valuable asset and have a good understanding of skills taught in Ms Luk’s Library class (i.e. skills related to reading, searching and using information), I believe students can yield twice the result with half the effort’.”

- Mr C.S. Fong, the Computer & General Studies Teacher

Ms Luk frequently holds joint-teaching sessions with other subjects. For example, during the joint session in P5 Chinese language, Ms Luk teaches SQ3R reading skills. She also introduces various reading strategies for students in other grades to support their learning. The subject teachers have realized the advantages of collaboration after observing students’ learning progress.

“Ms Luk offers assistance in two aspects. Firstly, the teacher-librarian helps organise workshops that focuses on reading strategies, such as speed reading, looking for keywords, searching and evaluating news, etc. In general, that is to teach students to search information and to read efficiently. Secondly, she borrows different types of books for us to meet our needs. In this way, we can provide more information for the students.”

- Ms W.Y. Kwan, the Chinese Language and General Studies Teacher

Ms Luk believes that teaching students reading strategies cannot improve their academic results overnight. However, it helps them realise that they can make use of the relevant skills to support self-learning. Effective reading skills can only be developed gradually by imperceptible influence and encouragement. Students need time and opportunities to develop these skills.

The Training of Student-Librarians

The teacher-librarian selects 40 students to be student-librarians every year. Students of Primary 4 or above are eligible to apply. The student-librarians use a roster system, with 20 students in one shift. Student-Librarians usually help in the school library during recess and lunch breaks. Their tasks include re-shelving, lending books and maintain order in the library. Apart from the training provided by the teacher-librarian, the more experienced student-librarian will also serve as leaders to lead the less experienced student-librarians to manage various tasks in the library. Through this, students can develop their leadership and interpersonal skills as well.

Ms Luk arranges students to rotate their jobs regularly to maintain their interest in working in the library. Moreover, students can learn different skills through handling various tasks in the library. Ms Luk labels the bookshelves with the name of the student-librarian who is responsible for that particular bookshelf. This “accountability system” helps to make division of labour clearer as well as to develop students’ sense of responsibility.

Ms Luk rewards outstanding student-librarians with prizes such as snacks, extra borrowing quotas and higher priority for borrowing new books. Interestingly, the student-librarians interviewed expressed that they were more than happy to work in the library even without any rewards. Some students pointed out that they go to the library for reading on Tuesdays and Thursdays even though they have to be on duty in the library every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This reflects that the library has been successful in developing students' interest in reading and working in the library.

“Being a student-librarian to help Ms Luk in the library can train up my sense of responsibility. I tidy up the bookshelf without Ms Luk reminding me.”

- Primary 5 Student Y.Y. Ho

Factors Facilitating School Library Work

The teacher-librarian brings a positive impact on supporting student learning by creating a reading atmosphere at the school, developing students' information literacy and collaborating with other subject panels. What are the favourable factors that facilitate the teacher-librarian to play her role effectively? The teacher-librarian is the information and media specialist in the school. In order to play such an important role effectively, the teacher-librarian needs to communicate effectively with other subject teachers and have a good understanding of their needs.

Library Subject Meetings

The Library subject meeting is held twice a year by the teacher-librarian for subject panels to join.. During the meeting held at the beginning of the academic year, subject teachers discuss with Ms Luk on such matters as what books need to be purchased or whether a block loan is needed. Also, subject teachers discuss and set the submission dates of reading report worksheets enclosed in the textbook “Fun Reading Journey”, so that students will not be overloaded with too many reading reports within a short period of time.

Interpersonal Skill

While the support from the school has greatly facilitated the work of the teacher-librarian, Ms Luk's personality is also a significant factor. The teacher-librarian often has to collaborate with subject teachers, and this requires good interpersonal skills. Ms Luk is an outgoing person who loves to interact with others, and this enables her to communicate with her colleagues more effectively to understand their needs. As a teacher-librarian, building up good interpersonal relationship with other teachers is another factor which enables Ms Luk to perform her job successfully.

Resources Allocation

Apart from effectively utilizing government subsidies, the school has allocated part of the school development fund for the development of the school library. The Head of School pointed out that the principle for using the school development fund in Canossa Primary School was that the

resources should be put into an area that all students can benefit from. In line with this principle, the fund is used for improving library facilities, which matches this principle..

Views of the School Leaders

Setting up of a School Reading Team

The Head of School believes that all teachers should promote reading with the teacher-librarian playing the leading role. For example, teachers can make use of lunch time to read a book instead of handling class matters. Besides, the Head of School could set up a school reading team comprising the teacher-librarian and other teachers, with the responsibility to promote reading culture among students.

Teacher-librarian should focus on library work

The Head of School expressed the view that the teacher-librarian should focus on the work related to the school library. Spending insufficient time on promoting reading and managing the library may not be beneficial to the students. The Head of School believes that the job of the teacher-librarian is professional, and the teacher-librarian should not be sidetracked by handling the work of other academic subjects.

“I think that we have to recognise the professionalism of teacher-librarians. Letting them focus on the work of the library, without overloading them with other teaching duties, such as Visual Arts or Maths, enables the teacher-librarians to carry out their roles effectively. Otherwise, the teacher-librarians may find it very difficult to position themselves, which is not desirable. After I came here, I can see that the teacher-librarian has a very clear and distinctive role. People relate her with books and reading and I consider this point is vitally important.”

Mr W.K. To, The Head of School

Conclusion

The successful example of Canossa Primary School illustrates a number of factors which facilitates the establishment of a strong reading culture. Firstly, the support from the school is very important. The Head of School recognizes the teacher-librarian’s professionalism and does not assign her other teaching duties. This enables her to focus on library management and promotion of reading culture. Reading activities, such as ‘The Head of School tells a tale’, is an example which allows the principal to serve as a role model for encouraging reading among students.

Introducing parental support is another key factor that helps the development of the library. As the school has arranged volunteer parents to be storytellers, the school can organise reading companion activities every Friday. This offers students plenty of opportunities to develop interest in reading through joining these activities.

The collaborative teaching mode of Canossa Primary School is worth noting. Apart from arranging formal Library subject meetings, Ms Luk enjoys taking the initiative to communicate with other teachers casually. This kind of informal connection is a key factor for establishing the collaborative relationship between the teacher-librarian and other teachers. The teacher-librarian can take a more active role in understanding the needs of the subject teachers for preparing suitable materials for them.

To allow students to serve as student-librarians not only can help them develop their sense of responsibility, but also support their personal growth and development. Overall, successful promotion of reading in Canossa Primary School is attributed to joint efforts from all members of the school, including the Head of School, the teacher-librarian, subject teachers and parents.