

3. Lam Tin Methodist Primary School

Introduction

Since 1999, Lam Tin Methodist Primary School has integrated information skills into the General Studies curriculum by adopting collaborative teaching to develop students' information literacy and self-learning abilities. Collaborative teaching has proved to be effective, and has been widely adopted in other subjects. The school has a rich reading culture with high library borrowing rates. The average number of annual borrowing per student (including books and e-resources) reached 231 in the 2010/11 school year. The school is experienced in reading promotion and collaborative teaching. In the following sections, we will explore how the school library promotes reading and supports subject teaching, and why the teacher-librarian can play an effective role in the school.

Establishing the Reading Culture

Lam Tin Methodist Primary School develops its library collection based on a curriculum-based strategy. Books are purchased according to the curriculum requirements. The school has classroom libraries in addition to a central library, which holds about 32,000 books, including 22,000 Chinese language books and 10,000 English language books. Large picture books, which are important for developing reading interest among young children, are displayed in prominent places in the central library to attract students.



Apart from developing a rich collection of books, Ms Chan, the teacher-librarian, co-ordinates and organises a range of diversified reading activities. It not only allows students to participate in the activities, teachers are also encouraged to take part in the activities to nurture a reading culture in the school. As parental support is crucial in arousing students' reading interest, Ms Chan conveys related information to parents and mobilises their support through different ways. The related school activities are discussed in the following sections.

Parent-and-Child Reading Award Scheme

The objective of this scheme is to encourage students to read and browse related websites so as to enhance students' reading interests and develop students' reading habits. This establishes a firm foundation for developing life-long learning. At the same time, it can also improve communication between students and their parents. It is expected that by encouraging students to share what they have read in class, their oral communication skills and self-confidence will also be strengthened.

This reading scheme is an activity that spans the entire school year. At the beginning of the school year, each student receives a reading record booklet which provides reading-related information, such as an introduction to information literacy, reading skills, ways to select books and useful web links. After reading a book or browsing a website with their parents, students may share their views with them, and record the information about the book/website in the reading record booklet and obtain their parents' signature for verification. Various awards are given in this scheme to encourage students' participation.

Big Brother and Big Sister Scheme

The objectives of the scheme are to cater for learner diversity, to develop a culture of love and care as well as to foster peer support. The scheme places much more emphasis on helping Primary 1 and 2 students with reading difficulties. The activity takes place during lunch time and each session lasts for about 20 minutes.

One or two students that need support are identified from each Primary 1 and 2 class. "Big Brothers" or "Big Sisters" are selected from a group of volunteer Primary 3 to 5 students by their class teachers. Each of the selected students from Primary 1 to 2 is then accompanied by a "Big Brother" or "Big Sister" who provides reading support to them. The school informs parents of the Scheme in the hope that they will encourage participation of their children. The teacher-librarian organises training for the "Big Brothers" and "Big Sisters" before they provide reading support for the younger students, including the introduction of words. Awards, including certificates and small presents, are given to the "Big Brothers" and "Big Sisters" who have outstanding performance.

Reading Aunts

Parent volunteers are recruited as "Reading Aunts". Their roles are to tell stories to junior primary students during recess and lunch periods. Mrs Leung, a parent volunteer, stated that the Scheme was beneficial to students:

"Most of the kids love listening to stories. If time allows, it is meaningful to be a 'Reading Aunt' because my child and other students can benefit from listening to stories."

- S.Y. Leung Kwok, parent of a Primary 3 student C.F. Leung

Mrs Chan, another reading aunt, said that she would tell stories to students together with her daughter. She expressed that this could improve the parent-child relationship and her daughter could also learn more knowledge from the stories:

“After my daughter listened to the stories told by the ‘Reading Aunts’, she asked me to join the Reading Aunt programme. In the past, my kids thought that the way how I told stories were boring, therefore I later joined the programme and attended the training sessions on storytelling skills at the school. I have been a Reading Aunt for two years already. Throughout these 2 years, I find out that students prefer to listen to stories told by reading aunts rather than their parents because they feel happier. Whenever I am going to tell a story at the school, my daughter will be excited to join me as well. She will show me the stories that she likes and share them with other students. This helps improving her creativity and Chinese reading comprehension skill.”

- Y.P. Chan Tong, parent of a Primary 4 student H.K. Chan



The ISLM Bookmark Project

The school library has recently joined the International School Library Month (ISLM) bookmark Project of the International Association of School Librarianship. This well-established international initiative is designed to broaden students’ horizons and enables them to learn more about different nationalities, cultures and customs.

This activity is jointly-coordinated by the teacher-librarian with the help of the English Language and Visual Arts teachers. Students are required to borrow an English book. They record the information of the book such as the title, author, publisher and introduction, on one side of the bookmark under the guidance of the English language teachers. Students then design the other side of the bookmark with the support of the Visual Arts teachers. The teacher-librarian collects all the bookmarks designed by the students and exchanges them with teacher-librarians in other countries. Ms Chan expressed that the students very much treasured the newly received bookmarks and agrees that the activity boosts their interest in reading.

The idea of recording the book information on one side of the bookmark was pioneered by Ms Chan. Many teacher-librarians in other countries now adapt this practice. Students learn how to look up book information, such as the author and the publisher, when they design the bookmark.



Production of Braille Books to Enhance Harmony

Several years ago, the teacher-librarian, Ms Chan, designed a Braille book to convey the message of harmony. The school successfully applied for resources from the Equal Opportunities Commission, and received assistance from The Hong Kong Society for the Blind to produce 1,000 Braille books. As the school was unable to find a publisher to produce Braille books on this scale, parents volunteered to help. They assisted in sticking the plastic Braille sheets below their printed counterparts. All students are required to read this book every year to experience the learning process and difficulties of the visually impaired. This enables students to understand that even though there are differences, people can still live together harmoniously. Overall this activity aims to promote a barrier-free society.



Teacher Reading Award Scheme

Although teachers have a heavy workload, they are eager to engage in professional development through reading. The Teacher Reading Award Scheme encourages teachers to read books related to schoolwork, professional development or personal development, and to share ideas through writing reading reports. The scheme is supported by the School Head and teachers. The past champions of the scheme wrote more than 40 reading reports during the school year. Some of the past reports were collected and published in “Teachers’ Writings” (《教師文集》), a school publication. These reports demonstrated how teachers learn through reading and successfully applied the new knowledge to teaching. The scheme not only aligns with the school’s development, it also helps nurture a reading culture in the school.

Promoting Parent Education to Strengthen the partnership between Parents and the School

Parent education has been prominent lately among schools in Hong Kong. Once parents have better understanding of information literacy and reading skills, both parents and students will benefit.

The teacher-librarian has organised a range of diversified activities, such as book exhibition on Parents’ Day, workshops on copyright and information literacy. These activities aimed to develop a partnership between parents and the school. The partnership allows both parents and the school to achieve the school’s goals in education.

In addition, the teacher-librarian encouraged parents to establish a “Home Reading Corner” at home to provide their children with family reading resources. Ms Chan suggests that there should be a minimum of 26 children books at home, and it is even better if there are some high-quality Chinese and English newspapers and magazines. These advices are listed in the Home-School Collaboration

Handbook provided to parents by the school. One parent, Mrs Leung, said that she installed a bookshelf at home to create a reading environment and the arrangement helped foster the reading habits of her children.

Support in Learning & Teaching

Design of the School-based Collaborative Library Curriculum

The school applies a school-based collaborative model in designing the “Collaborative Self-Learning Library Class”. It aims to teach students skills required for reading to learn. Topics cover areas such as school library services, public libraries services, various features of a book, classification of books, reading strategies, information skills, memorization skills, civic and moral education, reading interest, habit and attitude. The curriculum conforms to the annual development focus of various subjects. Ms Chan confers with teacher representatives about the details of the curriculum to ensure that there is no repetition of teaching content.

There is a weekly “Collaborative Self-Learning Library Lesson” for each class. The teacher-librarian and class teachers teach the course in turn. Some lessons focus on reading skills and learning strategies, while others provide reading and sharing opportunities for students. These lessons encourage students to develop a positive, enthusiastic and active learning attitude.

Collaborating with Subject Panels to Play the Role of a Learning Facilitator

Chinese Language Panel

The library plays a vital role in supporting and promoting reading activities related to Chinese language. For example, the Chinese Cultural Week and the reading of the Four Great Chinese Novels. The teacher-librarian introduces suitable books to the Chinese language teachers. The Chinese language panel head, Ms Liu, points out that the reading results of students in Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) have improved in recent years. This is attributable to the efforts of the school in promoting reading and the support of the library.

English Language Panel

One of the collaborations between the English Language panel and the school library is a year-round reading scheme. This scheme requires students to borrow and read three books biweekly, one of which must be an English book. The teacher-librarian assists the English language teachers by classifying the books according to different reading levels. The English language panel head, Ms Tsoi, noted that she did not initially have a close working relationship with the teacher-librarian, but the collaboration develops over time. She believes that the teacher-librarian’s assistance in book selection and book ordering is a great assistance to the English language teachers.

General Studies Panel

The teacher-librarian plays an important role in project learning in General Studies. Students have to complete individual project reports on different topics every year. Firstly, the teacher-librarian develops the library collection, which matches the General Studies curriculum so as to provide appropriate teaching and learning materials to teachers e.g. recommended booklist. Ms Chan also teaches students information skills, such as quoting sources properly and respecting copyright. Several years ago, Ms Chan volunteered to help promote project learning and take up a few General Studies lessons so that she could have a better understanding of the curriculum. The General Studies panel head opined that this arrangement enabled the teacher-librarian to learn more about the General Studies curriculum, which helped to improve the co-ordination of activities and thus benefits student learning.

To prepare students for the Liberal Studies curriculum in junior secondary school, a module on Liberal Studies has been added to the Primary 6 General Studies in the second semester. This module covers many social issues, such as poverty, wars and humanism. The teacher-librarian identifies, retrieves and prepares relevant information for teachers and students to use.

Religious Studies Subject Panel

The teacher-librarian has co-organised many events with the Religious Studies subject panel. For example, the teacher-librarian invited the librarian of HK Public Libraries to explain how to locate and retrieve religious books from the Public Libraries. The speaker also introduced audio-visual materials and online services related to the subject. Mr Chong Chan Yau was invited to explain how the visually impaired learn about Religious Studies through reading religious books in Braille. When organising these activities, the teacher-librarian discusses with the Religious Studies teacher about matters such as selection of guest speaker in the hope that students can learn more about the community. Besides, the teacher-librarian also helps Religious Studies teacher prepare CD resources, for example, audio visual resources for supporting student learning.

Favourable Factors for Fulfilling the Role of the Teacher-Librarian

Clear Policy

Under the leadership of the School Head, teachers clearly understand the direction of the school. The school has clear objectives, including the development of students' self-learning ability and students' good reading habits. The teacher-librarian plays a key role in these two areas.

The school administrative policy and procedures are clearly outlined in a set of documents accessible to all staff, including the duties of the teacher-librarian, the arrangement of library lessons, and areas which require special attention by class teachers, so that even newly appointed teachers can easily understand about the school operation.

In addition, the teacher-librarian has a detailed plan for developing information literacy. Ms Chan uses annual planner chart to illustrate clearly the resources and activities arranged for students, parents, and teachers. The respective objectives of each scheme for the year are also well defined. This is useful for evaluating the schemes, and contributes to better planning in the future.

Primary School Curriculum Leader Taking the Lead in Collaboration

Lam Tin Methodist Primary School places great importance on the professional development of its teaching team. The School Head believes that the school must clearly provide teachers with directions and goals. She expects all teachers to collaborate in order to achieve the goals. In fact, only relying on the teacher-librarian to promote collaboration cannot achieve desirable results. As the Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) (PSMCD) is the key person responsible for curriculum development, she chairs the collaborative meetings with the support of the teacher-librarian and this helps to promote collaboration.

The collaborative culture has been established because the development directions and goals have been laid out clearly and supported by staff. Subject teachers are accustomed to collaborative teaching. When problems arise, teachers participate in open discussions with their colleagues and as a result mutual understanding among staff is developed.

“In the beginning, there were too many collaborative activities, and I would discuss with the teacher-librarian to see if some of the overlapping ones could be rearranged. We remind each other and make adjustment after reaching a consensus.”

- Ms Liu, the Chinese Language Panel Head

Assistant to Support Library Operation

The school has arranged an assistant for supporting the teacher-librarian in maintaining the daily operation of the library. Ms Chan believes that with the help of a library assistant, she can accomplish more by delegating routine activities, leaving her more time to focus on professional matters.

Support for Teacher Librarians’ Professional Development

The teacher-librarian volunteered to teach General Studies lessons to gain a better understanding of the curriculum. To respect the teacher-librarian’s requests for professional development, the school has made adjustments to manpower allocation to enable Ms Chan to teach General Studies lessons. The School Head believes that such arrangement should be carried out without undermining the professional roles of the teacher-librarian, possibly through allocating a lighter subject teaching load to the teacher-librarian.

“It is essential to arrange a full-time teacher-librarian to be responsible for planning. Our teacher-librarian has been collaborating with various subject teachers for years, and a collaborative mode has already been developed. The operation of the Library is on track. Several years ago, Ms Chan requested to take up teaching duties so as to gain a better understanding of student learning. The school respected her request for professional development and growth. Under the condition that her professional role would not be undermined, we assigned a few lessons to her. The school arranged Ms. Chan to teach General Studies, so that she could gain more new insights. It was hoped that she could introduce more library resources that were closely in line with the curriculum. Whether a teacher-librarian takes up subject teaching depends very much upon his / her personal wish. In fact, through teaching library lessons, the teacher-librarian has already gained sufficient classroom experience. She also has the chance to build up relationship with students.”

- Ms Chan, The Head of School

Participation in Subject Meetings

The teacher-librarian participates in meetings of different subject panels. This enables her to learn more about their development focus each year, so that she can provide appropriate support to them. Ms. Chan believes that taking part in these meetings can give her more information on the development of different subjects.

“As the teacher-librarian has to collaborate with the PSMCD and various subject panels, the teacher-librarian has to attend subject meetings to gain a better understanding of the development objectives of various subjects. For example, the teacher-librarian has already started collecting books with Chinese pin-yin a long time ago, which is in line with the school's development in using Putonghua as a medium of instruction to teach Chinese Language”

- Ms Chan, The Head of School

Effective Channels of Communication

The teacher-librarian has a desk in the staff room, rather than secluding herself in the school library. This arrangement enables convenient communication between teachers and the teacher-librarian, and therefore enhances collaboration. The Religious Studies subject panel head, Ms Ho, said that this arrangement facilitates communication between herself and the teacher-librarian. For example, issues can be easily resolved through an informal chat in the staff room.

Participate in Seed Projects; Exchange with Outside Experts

The school has participated in various seed projects and school-based development programmes of the Education Bureau to inspire teachers to keep improving their teaching. Through joining various programmes, a collaborative culture among teachers has been established. The school encourages teachers to have professional exchange with external experts. For example, the teacher-librarian has

been invited by many outside bodies to share her experience in integrating information literacy elements into project learning.

“We encourage the teacher-librarian to have professional exchange with experts, and to bring back the latest information as well as local and overseas experience.”

- Ms Chan, the School Head

Conclusion

With the sustained collaboration made over the years by the school head, the teacher-librarian, teachers and parents, Lam Tin Methodist Primary School has established a strong reading culture. Teachers clearly understand that collaborative teaching and reading promotion is the major direction of the school development. In order to produce the best results with the least effort, the teachers are willing to devote themselves in collaborating with the teacher-librarian to promote and implement various schemes

The support from the School Head to the teacher-librarian is also crucial. Ms Chan believes that teachers can freely express their opinions to the School Head, who is always open and supportive to reasonable suggestions. For example, the teacher-librarian did not attend any subject meetings at the beginning, but the teacher-librarian believed that attending these meetings would enable her to better understand the curriculum and the teaching progress of other subjects. This allows her to provide the most suitable forms of support. Therefore, she suggested to the School Head that she would like to attend subject panel meetings. The School Head agreed and accepted her request. Besides, the School Head arranged an assistant for maintaining the daily operations of the library, so that the teacher-librarian may teach additional subject lessons as requested.

According to Ms. Chan, to excel in the role of a teacher-librarian, one has to be active, outgoing, and willing to proactively communicate with others. Also, different schools may have different cultures, the school library development and reading promotion should be based on school situation. The successful experiences of other schools can serve as references for other schools.

“It is not easy to be a successful teacher-librarian. A teacher-librarian should not lock herself up in the library, but should take the initiative in contacting various teachers for providing support.”

- Ms Liu, the Chinese Language Panel Head