SPICING UP WITH BIG BOOKS

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School-based Curriculum Action Research Series

The 21st century marks the development of an information or knowledge society with fast-changing needs and environment. In order to prepare our younger generation for their future needs, schools, through constant endeavours in search of excellence, have to provide students with different learning opportunities and experiences. In this respect, the school curriculum should best be aligned with the social development as well as the students’ interest.

Since 1998, the School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section (SBCDP) has been collaborating with school teachers in curriculum development in various Key Learning Areas. Building on the strengths and successful experiences accumulated over the years, the Section has initiated action researches jointly with teachers, aiming at empowering teachers to make informed decisions on curriculum research and development.

Why Do We Promote School-based Curriculum Action Research?

Collaborative school-based curriculum action research aims to:
- enable teachers to enhance quality learning and teaching through knowledge generated and constructed in the process of critical and systematic inquiry into different learning and teaching issues;
- develop teachers’ competence in curriculum development and research literacy as well as their sense of curriculum ownership; and
- develop schools into learning organizations through collaborative team work within schools and professional sharing in school networks.

How Do We Conduct Collaborative School-based Curriculum Action Research?

In the course of school-based curriculum development, teachers’ critical reflections will help them identify issues worth addressing in the form of an action research. The following steps illustrate the basic cycle in action research:

1. Examine critically learning- or teaching-related issues worth researching into
2. Define the research focus and review literature for current theories and practice
3. Develop action plans or intervention strategies
4. Implement action plans in contexts
5. Collect evidence and reflect on effectiveness of actions
6. Draw conclusions and use feedback to improve learning and teaching
7. Start a new cycle if necessary

As teachers progress through this spiral cycle, they improve their teaching through continual reflection and move closer to the solution of the identified problems. Taking the role as facilitator, Curriculum Development Officers from the SBCDP Section work as partners with teachers, rendering professional support throughout the research cycle, assisting them in reflecting and conceptualizing tacit knowledge embedded in their practice.

**How Can These Reports Be Used?**

This series of action research reports portrays the participating teachers’ educational beliefs and philosophy, and the developmental pathway undertaken to improve the school curriculum. The curriculum design, intervention strategies, action plans, research tools and instruments, as well as the findings and recommendations may be valuable references for teachers who intend to launch school-based curriculum development and/or collaborative action research in their schools. We sincerely hope that this series can serve as a platform to stimulate professional dialogue in curriculum research and development, and to spark off a research culture in primary schools in Hong Kong.

For comments and inquiries on the series, please contact

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1. **At the Beginning**

Primary 3 teachers of Our Lady of China Catholic Primary School (P.M.) were motivated to do an Action Research on shared reading

**Not because**
- ✗ Other schools are doing it, so should we.
- ✗ It looks good. Colleagues will look up to us. Parents will be impressed.

**But because**
- ✓ AR allows us to focus and go beneath the surface.
- ✓ In doing an AR we are in a better position to collect evidence of learning, to reflect on our experiences and to learn from each other.
- ✓ We know something about Shared Reading, but we want to know more.
- ✓ Big books appeal to students. We will find out how they can be effectively used for language learning.
- ✓ Students will not get bored easily if they have interesting things to read other than their textbooks.

We decided to “have a go” in the second term. The objectives of the project are:
- ✦ To stimulate more varied oral work and free writing
- ✦ To reinforce specific language items chosen from the texts
- ✦ To raise confidence in using English

Preparation took the first half of the term, and the action research actually began after Easter. We called the project “SPICING UP WITH BIG BOOKS”.

So, let the project unfold…….
Three units in the textbook New Welcome 3B are from the module on “Connecting with the natural world”. They share the common theme of “time” and the learning goal of “using the simple past tense to talk about past activities and states”. That was chosen to be the language focus of the project.
3. Adding the Spices

These resources were chosen for their relevance to the language focus and topics of the textbook units. Their contents would also appeal to students’ interest. Task-based oral and writing activities were designed to elicit meaningful responses to the reading materials in various forms.
4. What’s in the menu?
5. **Our pledge** -
   To keep our students happy and healthy with our diet.

- Communicate in English with greater confidence
- Use past tense correctly to relate past events
- Enjoy reading
- Take an active role in learning
- Learn more interesting vocabulary
- Learn to be creative
- Learn to think
- Learn to work with others
6. Now the cooks get busy!

A. In the classroom

i.  

The teacher showed the book cover and asked students what the book was about. They then talked about each picture and read the sentences.

ii.  

As students got absorbed into the story, the teacher stopped at a critical point, showed them the surprise ending and invited speculation on what happened in between. Students were intrigued. They came up with quite original ideas.

iii.  

Students were keen to find out what the pictures were about. They made spontaneous remarks about what they saw and how they felt.
iv. The teacher tried to relate the text to students and helped them to talk about their personal experiences. The rapport put students at ease and other students joined in the conversation.

v. At a later stage in the lesson, the focus was shifted to language usage. Students came out to match the present and past tense verb forms, which were later put on the wall chart for reference.
When students had learnt enough verbs in the past tense, teachers decided to let them have a go at discovering grammar rules. Small teams of students were given a number of verbs, all of which were taken from their reading. Their first task was to pair up the present tense and past tense forms. Students did this without much difficulty. Then, they were asked to discern the distinguishing features of the verbs and sort them into as many groups as they thought necessary.

While the teams were fumbling with the verbs, the teacher moved around, observing but holding off intervention. In the first few minutes, there was obvious confusion and students argued about what to do. Then came the “aha” moment for one or two students in the team. They discovered some patterns and started putting similar pairs together, e.g. the “+ed” group, the “+d only” group, and the “change spelling” group, etc. Others joined in, helping and correcting each other.

Some teams were less successful. Students failed to discover the patterns and they never fully agreed with each other. The teacher stepped in and gave hints. When the time was up, one or two teams were still hotly debating what to do with some verbs.

At the debriefing, the successful teams were invited to explain to the class how they figured out the sorting. Finally, the teacher corrected or confirmed their thinking. In this way, students used inductive reasoning to learn the grammar rules of the past tense verb formation.
B. Worksheets designed

These worksheets were designed to check understanding and to give language support for students to do the projects at the end of the unit.
C. Students’ written work

i. Project on “Now and Then”

Students were asked to write on topics they chose (e.g. houses, clothes, students themselves, etc.) and produce a poster showing the differences between the past and the present. Some classes worked in groups and some individually. The main source of ideas and language came from the reading materials, and students were encouraged to use words they knew and their personal knowledge.
ii. Writing Postcards

This was another attempt in writing for a real purpose. Students had read “Camping Last Summer” in the textbook, and they had just returned from an excursion to the New Territories. They were taught to write about their experiences to friends on postcards.
7. **Oops!! Something’s spoiling the soup!**

A. Where’s the bookstand?

   i.  

   A grave oversight – no bookstand! The teacher’s arms were aching. Holding the book with both hands, the teacher found it difficult to point to the words as she read, or to the pictures for cueing comprehension.

   ii.  

   At last, a bookstand was available, but the height could not be adjusted. Students suddenly grew too tall for the bookstand and they had to peek between each other’s heads to look at the book.
iii. Students in this class avoided the problem by special seating arrangements. This showed the teacher’s foresight and good planning.

B. Too much vocabulary

i. The teacher was trying to teach all the vocabulary items at one go, and the only feasible way was through translation. Students’ ears were tuned to the Chinese translations and mechanically they wrote them down on the page.

ii. Students got the wrong message that learning the new words is what reading is all about.
C. Interest frizzling out, zest lost!

Students’ attention span was challenged after 15 minutes’ of the teacher beating word meanings on them. By this time the story was a distant thing and had nothing to do with them emotionally.
Catering for individual differences was a big challenge for teachers. Despite what we thought was systematic instruction and practice, some students failed to reach the learning goals. In some classes, the failure cases were few, but in others the proportion was rather alarming. An immediate concern for us was to give feedback to these students and improve their work. In the long run, we have to look inwards for
answers to the problems. We have to identify the mismatches and inadequacies in our curriculum and strategies. We owe it to our students to become better teachers.
E. Time’s out!

After reading the Big book “The Barbecue”, teaching was temporarily suspended for one week because of the school-wide “Cross Curriculum Integration” Project. Upset by the loss of time, we made a few hasty changes to our plan with some rather negative consequences.

(a) The big book “Rani and the Weather Machine” had to be dropped and “Wayne’s Box” received only a brief reading in most classes. As a result, the planned curriculum for this Action Research was only half accomplished.

(b) The postcard writing, originally based on “The Barbecue”, was changed to base on students’ field trip during the Integration Week. We thought that the textbook unit on “Camping Last Summer” would provide useful scaffolding for students. Unfortunately, we did not see much transfer of learning. Except for the A-stream students whose writing was informative and well structured (Examples 1 & 2), the other classes did not do well. One teacher provided students with a ‘model’ to copy, and the good ones attempted small variations (Examples 3 & 4). Another teacher gave students a free hand and accepted almost anything they wrote, which sometimes was just a collection of biological names copied on location (Examples 5 & 6). It therefore cast doubt on the level of comprehension and meaning of the task for the students.

Example 1

Example 2

These students were able to write about what they did and how they felt on the field trip in simple correct English.
These writings were largely identical with slight differences in details.
Example 5

Example 6

These students apparently lacked the purpose and the support for the writing task.
8. Getting the Reviews

- Paraphrased from student interviews * conducted at the end of the project (* see interview questions on page 25)

On the books read:

A. “The Barbecue”

“The Barbecue” is really funny. I like to read it.

It made me laugh when the rain came pouring down on the dads.

I think the story is silly. I don’t like it.

B. “100 Years Ago”

I like reading “100 Years Ago” because it teaches me many things about how people lived in the past.

I learnt many new words from “100 Years Ago”. That’s why I like it.

“The Barbecue” was interesting but the vocabulary was too simple.

I found “100 Years Ago” very boring.
C. “Wayne’s Box”

The magic in “Wayne’s Box” is kind of interesting.

The teacher brought in a teddy bear (Winnie the Pooh) and told us the story of “Wayne’s Box”. It was fun.

I liked the teddy bear.

I liked the teacher’s storytelling. She talked like the teddy bear.

I don’t like the book at all. It is boring.

The teacher told us the story first in English and then in Chinese. I think I could understand the book even if she did not use Chinese. I could get the meaning from the pictures.
Reviews: On the project “Now and Then”

I didn’t have much difficulty with the project. The teacher told us where to find the pictures. Even if we did not find the pictures in newspapers or magazines, we could draw them.

Our teacher told us to write about anything we liked. I chose pencils, but I think next time I would do costumes of the Tang Dynasty; it might be more interesting.

I wrote about myself in the project. I drew some black and white pictures to show the past and some pictures in colour to show the present. It was enjoyable work.

I think it is easier to write about myself because I could use my old photos.

The teacher taught us how to write the captions. I tried to use words that I have learnt, so I didn’t have any big problem in writing.

I’m quite pleased about the project.

I can’t remember anything about the project.
The teacher asked us to write only one sentence on each picture. Could I have written more? Sure. I had more to say, but I thought it was not allowed.

Good thing the teacher only asked us to write one sentence. I don’t like to write. I prefer watching TV.

I had no one to help me at home. On Saturday I traveled to my uncle’s and he helped me.

I got help from my maid.

We did the project in a group. I was responsible for the cover. KY did the part on stamps and Timmy did the toys. We had a great time working on this project. The teacher also helped us a lot. We hope that next time we don’t have to rely so much on the teacher.

We learnt to write in the past tense. I think the project gave us more time to think about how to write. It’s different from doing exercises in the PLP (the workbook). I like doing the project more.

I prefer working on the PLP exercises because it helps me in revising for the examinations. The project cannot.
When the teacher asked us to predict what happened after the sausages were burnt, I kept quiet. I knew I would not get the right answer.

I think I would like to make guesses. It is also a good idea to change the story ending. It will be more fun.

If more of us would speak up and make predictions, we would be able to learn from each other...There’ll be more ideas...We should learn to be more proactive and have the guts to say what we think.

I made a wild guess. I knew it would not matter whether I got the right answer or not.

The sausages were burnt. The children were hungry. What did they do next?
Reviews: On English learning in general

I don’t think I have changed much in these months. I still don’t like reading English books.

We liked reading the storybooks. They were short and easy.

My classmates were always noisy and misbehaving. The teacher sometimes got angry and fierce. I don’t like my English lessons as much as before.

I would try to find English books in the library, but most of the books were too difficult. I could only look at the pictures.

I think English is getting easier for me. I liked it when the teacher was teaching more slowly and explaining more. But recently I found the pace was getting too slow. Was it because I am getting better?

We’ve had more opportunities to read aloud together and in groups. I have made some slight improvement in recognizing and pronouncing the words.
**Student interviews**

*OLC (01-02) AR – Student interviews 13.3.02*

Questions

1. Do you like English lessons? Why?
2. What activities do you like in the English lessons? What do you learn from them?
3. How much do you participate in class?
4. Do you read regularly? What kind of books do you read? Where do you get those books?
5. Can you tell me some of the books you read recently?
6. Do you like writing in English? Why?
7. What do you do when you have problems in writing English?

(Other remarks)

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**OLC (01-02) AR – 2nd Student interview**

1. In the 1st interview (March 2002), you said you liked / did not like English (Quote response). Do you feel the same or differently now? Why? Any additional reasons you want to give?

2. In the last two months you have read some big books and small readers with your teacher. Do you still remember what you read? Do you like those books? Which one do you like best / least? What makes you feel this way? (Books include: Long ago and Today, 100 Years Ago, The Barbecue, Wayne’s Box)

3. Can you tell me how you feel about doing the project on “Now and Then”? Was it interesting? What help did you get from your teacher? Did you have any problems? Did you solve the problems? Do you think you have done a good job? If you were to do the project again, would you do anything differently?

4. Did you do anything with the other storybooks? (If students show hesitation, remind them: “The Barbecue” – predicting story events; “Wayne’s Box” – writing wishes) Do you have anything to say about them?

5. Do you think that by reading storybooks together in class (like what the teacher did with you in the last two months), you have become more interested and confident in reading English books on your own? (Ask for more details) Would you like your teacher to read more storybooks with you in class next year?

6. Any other relevant questions

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*Selected students were interviewed in small groups at the beginning and the end of the project. Their responses gave some indication on whether the actions had been effective or not, and how students perceived their progress in competence and confidence.*
9. The cooks are reflective & cooking tips

We chose the right books. They were interesting and suitable. “The Barbecue” was particularly interesting and stimulated a lot of prediction and comments from students.

The prediction strategy that we discussed at our meeting really worked. I got the students interested in the story in “The Barbecue”. Then I stopped at the critical moment and asked them to predict what happened. They were all motivated to guess. Some had good ideas.

**Tips #1**
Always choose books that are interesting. Our first aim is for students to have fun and enjoy reading. If they don’t enjoy, they won’t learn.

Offer a mixed variety of topics and genres in the books to cater for individual preferences.

**Tips #2**
Use students’ curiosity and imagination. Activate their personal knowledge. Be spontaneous. Let no one feel that they have the wrong answer.

The reader “100 Years Ago” was not available in the big book format. I thought it might help students if I gave them the text beforehand. However, when I was presenting the book in class, I found that they all read from the text in response to my questions. As a result, there was no room for prediction or creative thinking.

“When we are about to embark on a new experience, we often try to predict what might take place. Prediction can help us meet a new experience with greater understanding, appreciation, and confidence, even if our predictions turn out to be not altogether accurate. The same thing happens when we ask children to anticipate the content of a story. They will be inclined to listen to the story more attentively when they have developed their own expectations first and will therefore gain more from the read-aloud session.” (Slaughter 1993)
I knew the lesson would be video-taped, so I thought more about my teaching and prepared more. My presentation attracted the students. They paid attention and gave active response. I felt good. I believe that preparation is the key to a successful lesson.

Tips #3
An able driver keeps his eyes on the road, not on the car, lest it may crash. So, keep your eyes on the students and their needs. Good preparation helps you do just that.

I invited the class to read along with me several times. I thought that they were confident enough to read alone. I called on KY. She burst into tears. I should have known that she was the shyest pupil in the class. I could have asked others to try first.

Tips #4
Create a low-threat atmosphere through shared reading. Do multiple readings over several lessons until they are intimate with the characters and familiar with the language. In this way students won’t feel the pressure to perform before they are ready.

“Repetition is an indispensable element in language acquisition and the enjoyable repeated reading of a story is one of the most likely ways of allowing the language in the book to be assimilated into the child’s language repertoire (Ng & Preston, 1993)” (Ng Seok Moi 2000)
I think I tried too hard to teach everything. I explained too much and used too many difficult words. I also translated too much. I wasn’t aware of this until I saw my own tape. Now I know I have to work on my weaknesses.

Tips #5
Attraction comes before love. So, make the first encounter with the book an attractive one. How else can you stimulate that desire to read it?

“An important aspect of the shared book experience is its sequencing of instruction. Children first become familiar with an entire story; teachers then use this familiarity to help students gradually to smaller segments of text – sentences first, then phrases and words within sentences, and finally letters within words.” (Slaughter 1993)

I read to the class and asked them many questions. But I found that they did not really understand the words. I think I should have used more real objects to pre-teach the vocabulary.

Tips #6
If you have to spend a whole lesson pre-teaching the “key” words, then it is not the right book for your students. Make that professional judgment to find another more suitable book.

I don’t get it. How could I not teach all the vocabulary items? Will they understand the book if they don’t know the words?

I used the pictures. It saves a lot of explanations.

“Reading unknown words is a prediction exercise for all readers; for the young ‘early reader’ it is an exciting guessing game in which they use their experience, their language, the cues from the book and the encouragement of their teacher, relative or friend to guess at the most likely meanings. By providing books which tell good stories in natural language, teachers offer children the best possible chance of making correct predictions. Their pleasure at their success provides the stimulus to proceed with the guessing game and this in turn brings enjoyment, motivation and further success. This is the reality of learning to read by reading.” (Story Chest 1991)
While it is important for the book to be age-appropriate, shared reading can still bring enjoyment to older students. Show them how reading sounds and how language works in a meaningful context.

Use the small versions of the big book for re-reading, either in a group or independently. Repeated readings bring new understanding of the text and boost confidence for more independent reading.

I was so frustrated with the bookstand. The students still couldn’t see the book. I suddenly realized that they are getting too big for this Big Book reading. There was simply not enough room to sit them in front of the book. We should think of using small readers instead. But can we conduct shared reading with small books?

Tips #7

Yes, you can. I tried using the TV, though the screen was a little too small. The OHP is another alternative.

My concern is not so much the classroom setting as finding suitable Big Books. Big Book stories mainly cater for young children. I’m afraid older students will find the subject matter too childish. So I agree that we will eventually have to turn to small readers and move onto guided and independent reading.

“In shared book experience and related language experience programs, teachers provide a favorable environment and an emulative model within it…. They give hints about how to solve problems in reading and writing and provide simple answers to direct questions. But the complex work of learning is carried out by the individual learners in a self-regulative manner, and the teacher does not pretend to know what all children ought to be doing and how they ought to be functioning. The children learn to be actually behaving in the skill, and by approximating towards mature functions.” (Don Holdaway 1979)
The reading of the big book or the class reader can be the basis for a lot of interesting activities. However, it’s never the activities that matter but the reading itself. The ultimate goal of teaching reading is students reading and learning on their own. A good way to achieve this is through extensive reading and reading for pleasure.

"Martinez and Teale (1988) recommend further that the goal of an emergent reading program should be ‘to foster voluntary reading among the children so that they will develop positive attitudes and the inclination to select books for independent use and to sustain their attention to these books’ (p. 568)” (Slaughter1993)
I had difficulty helping individual students do their free writing. Would it be better if I have limited their choice? The task would be more manageable, I think.

For the project on comparing now and then, I gave students some topics to choose from – transportation, clothing, food, and toys. Some students went beyond that. They chose to compare stamps. That was original.

It was not easy for students to find pictures. Their families do not buy newspapers or magazines, and they do not have computers. They told me what topic they wanted to work on and I had to find pictures for them.

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Tips #9

Project caters for a wide range of abilities. The least able / least supported students may just draw one picture and label it with a word, while a good / well-supported student can find lots of information and have plenty to write about. Therefore, choice is important because it gives the space for individual efforts.

However, if the majority of students in a class are weak, it may be practical to stay within a more defined area and use more modeled writing.
The idea of this project (comparing the present and the past) is very good. Students were eager to do it. But maybe it was not the most suitable time for the task. They had just started to learn a few verbs in the past tense and they could not write too much. Perhaps it would be better if we put it off till a later stage, when we had taught all the three units. That could have given them more input in terms of ideas and language.

**Tips #10**

Scaffold free writing with as many pre-writing activities as necessary.

One such activity is to ask small groups to brainstorm ideas on a topic. Use their ideas to create a master list on the blackboard. Then model writing for the class. Invite students to help create sentences on the board with the brainstormed ideas. Let students write their first drafts with sentences borrowed from the shared writing, but encourage them to vary with their own ideas and words. Always give the opportunity for them to share their drafts and re-write with the feedback.

I always thought that my students were not able to do what I wanted. I didn’t have much confidence in them, so I seldom gave them challenges. Now I see and I believe. I think I have to change my mind!

This project was too difficult for my class. They made many mistakes in their English. But I know they have tried their best. I told them in class where to find the information and many did try. I was touched by their effort.

**Tips #11**

Decide on assessment criteria for projects. Take into consideration students’ efforts and attitude towards self-learning or peer learning, besides language and content. Give positive feedback and always point the way to further improvement. Make it a habit for students to re-write with the feedback. Respond with interest to their new writing.

“Students tend to internalize the beliefs teachers have about their ability. Generally, they ‘rise or fall to the level of expectation of their teachers… When teachers believe in students, students believe in themselves. When those you respect think you can, YOU think you can’ (James Raffini 1993).”
10. A few words from the “Advisory Cook”

We set out to add ‘spices’ of shared books to enhance the ‘flavour’ of learning. How well did we fare? Are we as good as we pledged? I think we have to admit that we only succeeded partially as shown in the reflections by teachers and reviews by students. After all, we did not use all the ‘spices’, and it would take longer time for all of us to master the skills of ‘adding spices’.

There are a few interesting revelations as I compared students’ reviews with teachers’. While teachers were more concerned with their instructional effectiveness, students talked more about why they liked (or did not like) the stories. It seems that no one book satisfies all students, but humour and magic always work. It is important that teachers listen to the students and find suitable books that motivate them. It cannot be said enough about the power of a good story on student learning.

Some of the students’ reasons given for liking or not liking a book apparently reflect the approaches used by the teachers. When the emphasis has been put on vocabulary teaching, students got the message that learning new words is what reading is all about. They do not know that there are different reading strategies for different purposes (e.g. to read for information or to read for enjoyment). Indeed, they may likely be scared away from a good book simply because of some difficult words. So it is essential for teachers to set a clearly defined reading purpose for each lesson and teach the appropriate skills.

From teachers’ comments, the project on “Now and Then” was too difficult for most students and we have seen evidences of some rather unsatisfactory work. However, interestingly most students said they did not have much problem doing the project, and many said that they enjoyed the work. How are we going to interpret this discrepancy? Clearly the project has given students a sense of novelty and the freedom to be personal and creative. That explains why they liked it. However, as far as their expressive skills in writing is concerned, most of them fell short of the desired fluency as well as accuracy. So, are students being complacent, or are they just not aware of the standard expected of them? Where do they get the standards? Do they have good models to emulate? I think in general we have to raise our expectations for
students and teach them to expect more of themselves. We can show them good models and scaffold them towards higher standards. We can share with them our learning intentions and success criteria. We can use feedback effectively to challenge them to think and extend their ability. In these many ways we hope that they can learn how to learn and take an active role in their own improvement.

As partners, we have been engaged in a process of working and learning together. **How good was our professional learning?**

I started by offering resources, informing teachers of the intended uses, and showing them new ways of teaching. In return, teachers added to, and sometimes counteracted, my ideas based on their personal needs and knowledge of their students. Then we got ourselves involved in a cycle of planning, actions and reflections. In the process we built interpersonal relationships and shared understandings of the *what*, *why* and *how* we did certain things. In general, things went smoothly. However, at times we had to sacrifice harmony for critical reflections on what went wrong in our plans or in the classrooms. Such times were moments of tension and sometimes tempers flared. However, in the spirit of doing the best for our students, we were more or less able to ride through those tides and come out stronger in our professional learning.

Our lessons were prepared as thoroughly as time and our capacities allowed. However, I constantly asked myself this question: *How detailed can lessons be prepared without running the risk of becoming prescriptive and thus suffocating teachers’ individuality?* I believe that teachers have rich tacit knowledge and practical experience. In working and learning together for change, I have to assist them to reflect on and adapt existing practices, make sense of the ‘innovations’ and their underpinning principles, build up the skill and confidence to use the new practices, and integrate them into their teaching repertoire. Obviously teachers have an active role to play in this transformation process. The key lies in their critical reflection of what they have done and how students are impacted.
**How do teachers reflect?** This could be a very private affair, or it could be done openly with people we trust. The school culture is a strong deciding factor in how much teachers are willing to share reflections, including one’s fears and hopes. When teachers have a habit of working and learning together for change, they would gain a close understanding of each other’s work based upon observation and in-depth discussion, and act as each other’s critical friend. In our case, I think we have started building up such a school culture but there is still a long way to go.

When we talk about observation and reflection, we often assume that we know what they mean and how to do them. In fact, they are difficult skills to be mastered with sensitivity and practice. In the course of the action research, I observed teachers in action and video-taped some of the lessons which were meant for peer observation and discussion. However, as we ran out of time, the tapes could not be shown at our meetings (though my feedback to the teachers were shared). Instead I handed the tapes to the respective teachers and asked them to do their own evaluative viewing. I gave them some guiding questions for focus. Most of the teachers’ reflections, however, tended to be brief and superficial. I mention this with the greatest respect for their hard work and devotion to their profession, but it does point to the fact that we all have to learn to observe so that we can observe to learn.

I have spoken candidly about my experience in this school because I know I still have many more opportunities to work and learn together with the teachers. May this little report serve as a platform for our future collaborative inquiry into how students learn English and how we can become better teachers.
11. References


Ng, S. M. (2000). Young Hong Kong children learning English as speakers of other languages. Hong Kong: HKCECES.


Resources


