

HHCKLA Buddhist Wisdom Primary School

Name of Awarded Teacher : Leung Chui Chun

How Teachers' Belief on 'What is Achievable in English Teaching?' Changed through the Development of the School-based English Language Curriculum

Introduction

Our students' out-of-school source of support in English learning and exposure has been and is still far from satisfactory. Some teachers in our school fell prey to the defeatist belief that what can be done for our students in the learning and appreciation of the beauty and utility of English was severely limited. Expectations on students were low. Many of our English teachers were frustrated by the lack of student progress. Input of teacher effort in daily 'routine' practice and drills of patterns, design of language tasks and assignments etc. was escalating but with no comforting evidence of student learning and motivation surfaced. Our professional role and the meaningfulness of our curriculum routine were my concern when I approached proficient level in my classroom teaching. I saw what would be coming if we did not find a way out.

I started experimenting with process writing in my class in 1998. It was because we found that our students were not interested in our conventional Guided Writing. Pupils were handing in writing assignments with little trace of their own views or feelings. No generation of ideas was needed. English was not activated as a vehicle of students' emotions, concerns and their connections with their world. Students were just like assembly-line workers, turning in combined pieces of words which bore no relationship to their lives and interests. Something had got to be done. I believe that students can be motivated to write by adopting a process-writing approach. I tried out process writing in my own class. It was quite effective. I was amazed by the work of my students. Their motivation and confidence were so different than before. I was convinced and continued to improve the way of process writing.

I tried to persuade my colleagues by sharing with them my experiences through informal interaction. I showed them the work of my students. They were impressed and were willing to experiment this approach in their own classes. It was, however, not a plain sailing process. I had to provide my colleagues with evidence and allow much time for them to accommodate my messages. Supporting measures and revamping of some ineffective practices in our English panel were consolidated. In most cases, colleagues' participation in the decision process was my top priority. More and more colleagues were convinced and willing to take up the challenge. Our P.2 to P.6 students now have process writing.

With the concerted efforts of my colleagues, we have now developed a whole set of process writing tasks that are related to the themes in the textbooks. Seeing that the children are really changing, some colleagues initiated changes by themselves. For example, they suggested compiling a series of mini-writing tasks so that our children have more platforms to express themselves in English.

As students have a sense of satisfaction in the process of writing, they are more willing to learn English. Their motivation to learn English is enhanced. They want to master the language because they know there are many platforms for them to use the language meaningfully in our school. All children love to express themselves once appropriate guidance or comment is provided. And teachers are the ones to establish this platform for them. We also understand the importance of a conducive language environment for our students in a society with English as the second language. Therefore, all our colleagues work together to provide a wide range of English activities for our students outside the classroom.



Defeatist beliefs are weakened. The changes in students' attitude and performance in writing effected a change in paradigm among some of my colleagues. They are more ready to change for the benefit of students. They are much more ready to try new ideas and take up challenges. From then on we have developed different school-based practices including phonics teaching and reading workshops. We even join a large-scale seed project on English reading.

Good practices are promoted through consensus building, collaborative working culture as well as in-house sharing in our school. Most of the endeavours are therefore introduced through colleagues' suggestions and initiatives or after consultation. Teaching is not individual work. Our colleagues work collaboratively. Good experiences and practices are disseminated in our school through various systematic in-house sharing. Experienced teachers on a certain area would work as mentors to try out alternative strategies. We also seek every opportunity to upgrade our expertise or to obtain external professional support. I am proud of being a member of our team of professional teachers of English.

The above was my prime focus in these few years. I also helped head-start our curriculum change for the whole school about five years ago. The general approach was the same. Paradigm change among our colleagues was the first agenda. Capacity building was the second. The aim was to develop a mechanism so that our students can learn much better and have the most enlightening school experiences. We had advice from external experts at the beginning. We introduced project learning, life-wide learning, social services, etc. All these are now embedded in our school curriculum. In the process, professional autonomy, ownership, joint decision-making and evidence-based decision-making are some of the more important elements that we would like to promote in our school. However, there are still many frustrating cross-roads ahead. Our curriculum reform effort is still under development and review. In spite of the escalating workload and coordination problem, our school will continue to strive for excellence with our colleagues' commitment and readiness for capacity growth.

In these few years, I see in my students how small and yet meaningful successes bring joy, confidence and uplifted values about oneself as a person. They manage to excel in an area which they think is insurmountable. Their perspectives have changed and they have higher expectations of themselves. Many of my colleagues were 'converted'. They believe that with appropriate support, every student can grow.



English Guide reads a book with junior schoolmates.



P.1 children participate actively in English reading workshops.



Way of Access to Further Information of the above Teaching Practice

Please contact Ms Leung Chui Chun for further information.

Preferred Way of dissemination / collaboration

Sharing sessions

Contact

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Remarks of the Assessment Panel

Ms Leung possesses excellent teaching skills and sound knowledge of the English curriculum. She is an outstanding teacher with fabulous insights into English Language teaching, a competent and highly committed teaching professional who has successfully established a collaborative culture among her colleagues.

Ms Leung shows great dedication and a passion for educating young learners. Holding a fervent belief in the impact of process writing approach on the students' English language skills, she has successfully enhanced the students' motivation to write and confidence to use English in their daily interactions. More importantly, she has helped unleash her students' drive to excel.

Through the collaboration of her fellow teachers, Ms Leung has introduced various curricular changes to address issues like compartmentalization of subjects and lack of coherent learning experiences of the students. She has also initiated a number of curricular changes which include integrating the teaching of phonics and process-oriented writing approach into the school-based English curriculum. She adopts the strategy of "think big, start small and move in small steps" in the curriculum reform, usually starts with better classes to test for workability before extending to the whole school. In this way, she has successfully steered the school towards a whole-school approach to the teaching of process writing. She always sets a good example of personal commitment before introducing any changes. Not only has this bottom-up approach earned Ms Leung the trust of her fellow teachers, it has also effected a change in paradigm among some of her colleagues.

Ms Leung is not just an English teacher but an exceptionally committed educator. Her significant contribution to the school-based curriculum development, her readiness to go beyond the school for further contribution to the education of Hong Kong, and her pursuit of professional development are commendable.

