

In the course of curriculum or assessment development, why is it necessary to cater for diversity in Hong Kong classrooms? What are some practical ways you can do this?

In the history of Hong Kong education, inclusive education has been advocated since 1970s. The ideology of ‘Inclusive Education’ originally focused on students with disabilities, however, it addressed wider exclusion issues, such as gender and language, to improve learning for all children nowadays. (Save the Children, 2009) Regular schools are encouraged to accept students with Special Education Needs. Later in 1997, Whole School Approach has been promoted to enhance inclusive education quality. Regular schools are expected to provide a better inclusive study environment based on the school culture, policies and practices. The Education Bureau will also provide School-based Educational psychology Service, Speech Therapy Service and Student Guidance Service to cater for diversity in Hong Kong classrooms. Given the resources that the government constantly provided, the importance for enhancing education quality is revealed.

There are two main reasons to carry out these education reforms to improve our education system continuously. First, the background of Hong Kong students is becoming more complicated. There are more new immigrants from the mainland China and other countries, who need help to adapt our community, education is not only for local students anymore.

Students from China may not receive any early childhood education. Their academic knowledge may be poorer than students growing up in Hong Kong. Students from other countries may have entirely different language and religious background from those in Hong Kong. As they are in strange environment, they need more guidance in learning. Besides background difference, the ability to learn can differ between individuals. Hong Kong society values young learners, so people are more alert on individual learning difference. Once educators find out the reason of a student having learning obstacles, they need to make solutions. Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia) is a common problem among students, and they confront different obstacles when learning such as troubles in speaking, recognising words, reading and spelling. They may have their own talents but the problem hinders them in classroom learning or even school life. They should receive a more custom-made education, so that they will be able to develop their talents and attain knowledge. The heterogeneity has caused our education to reform and meet the needs of these students.

Second, a quality education should cater for students' diversity and use it as a tool to foster a better learning environment. Diversity does not necessarily refer to lower-achievers or dyslexic students. It can be cultural, language, learning and physical diversities. In fact, gifted students are also categorized as SEN students. They may be superior in specific subjects, but inferior in other aspects. According to a policy statement of Save the Children (2006), "achieving quality education for all can only be achieved

through the creation of inclusive educational environments which welcome and accommodate all children without discrimination” (p.2). As Hong Kong is a developed city, it is very important that the education environment is suitable for all kinds of students instead of a certain kind. Now, teachers cannot apply the same teaching strategies to these students and expect them to have the same good result as the others. They should take SEN into consideration during curriculum organisation, and make suitable accommodation according to different learning progress in curriculum implementation. The schools should aim for quality education and share the responsibility of creating an inclusive culture so that students learn to respect and appreciate individual differences. Quality education should be an inclusive education which provides extra helps to SEN, such as emotion control training, after school tutorial, peer support scheme and school network support. By catering for student diversity, it is believed that this is the most effective mean of combating discrimination, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (Save the Children, 2006).

In the course of curriculum development, teachers are the greatest roles in Inclusive Education. Lindsay (2007) points out that teachers’ practice is crucial to achieve effective inclusive education:

These included general educational practice applied to the pupil with SEN (e.g. effective scaffolding; developing a modelling positive interactions and ambience; contingency management and effective instructional methods including feedback). Also identified as important were collaboration with other

teachers and the school administration. (p. 12)

The above statements show that teachers can facilitate students' achievement by effective curriculum design. The below is an overview of the typical English curriculum in primary schools in Hong Kong. From the concept map, it is obvious that textbooks and readers are the main teaching sources, which need students to use reading skills.

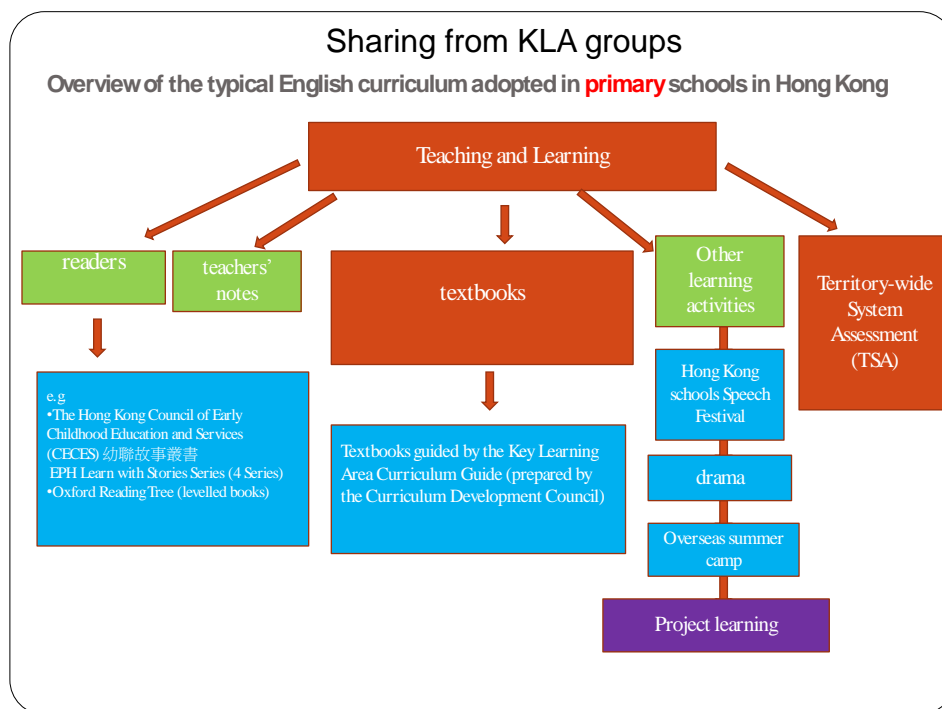


Fig.1 Typical English curriculum adopted in primary schools
 (extracted from Dr. Lam's notes)

However, teachers should aim for creating an inclusive study environment by planning curriculum and teaching implementation.

In the curriculum organization, teachers can adopt collaborative teaching to facilitate different teaching effects. Collaborative teaching refers to a group of teachers prepares and teach students together. In some schools, One-Teaching One-Assisting is more popular among teachers. One teacher takes charge of the lesson while the other teacher-assistant offers more detailed and specific instruction to SEN. For example, there is a NET scheme called Primary Literacy Programmes. The NET can adopt teaching strategies including story-telling, reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading. If a classroom has student diversity, the NET will have difficulty in using the different strategies on different students. Therefore, One-Teaching One-Assisting can assure there is an assistant-teacher to help to carry out these activities. While brilliant students can do independent reading with teacher guidance, the other group of students with dyslexia can have another teacher to help with reading aloud. As for normal lessons, one local teacher can be responsible for the whole class teaching, whilst another teacher can approach to SEN and offer easier challenges. This approach can guarantee no students will be left behind in learning progression. One more teacher in the classrooms can also help monitor students' discipline (especially students with Hyperactive Disorder) to make sure the lesson can carry on smoothly. Furthermore, One-Teaching One-Assisting allows teachers to exchange their opinions about teaching accommodation after lessons. This ensures different students can achieve their learning targets with different learning steps.

For some students who suffer from serious learning difficulties, teachers should design Individual Education Plan (IEP) during curriculum organisation. An IEP provides individualised goals, appropriate learning strategies, additional services and a schedule. (BCSSA, 2009) The goals of studying are usually divided into different domains: learning, language, communication and social skills. The teachers will set long term and short term targets for them according to their areas of SEN. The IEP will be a guide for implementation of learning support inside and outside the classroom to align the education curriculum. First, teachers will identify his/her strengths and weaknesses before making a custom plan. Then, a custom curriculum implementation will be assigned. For instance, there is a student with Asperger's Syndrome. He is good at mathematics and drawing, but refuses to communicate with peer. During the mathematics curriculum organization, teachers can implement co-learning group in the lessons. He can use 'Question Card' and 'Reminder Card' to communicate with his classmates. As a result, the student can learn communication skills in his favourite subjects, and he can gain peer appreciation when they solve questions together. Other outside classroom support may be social skill trainings, extra-curricular activities, after school contest and parental implementation. In this way, he will be more willing to talk to others and eventually lessen the symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome. The classroom learning environment will also be improved and achieve inclusive education.

In curriculum implementation, teachers should adopt different

teaching modes to explore students' different strengths. Besides Hong Kong Education Bureau, the United Kingdom Department of Education (2011) also stresses on developing students' understanding through the use of all available sense and experience. It is better for teachers to select a theme related to students' life according to the textbooks, e.g. festivals. Teaching modes can vary from visual (watching movies/drama), aural (Christmas songs), tactile and olfactory (smell of rice cake). Students get the idea of festivals from different senses and learn the vocabulary from different sources. For students with hyperactive disorder, fresh teaching modes such as songs and movies can attract them to pay attention in class. To enhance their knowledge uptake, teachers can also use highlighting, mind maps, tables, I.T. or symbols as assistance in teaching. For students with dyslexia, highlighting letters with different colours can help memorising words. During planning learning activities, teachers should set greater differentiation of tasks and materials so every student can experience success and be motivated to achieve higher standard (UK Department of Education, 2011). This means choosing knowledge and skills from easy to difficult stages. The greater the diversity of students is in, the broader the range of knowledge and skills will be. As long as teachers assign suitable level of learning activities to SEN, SEN will gain satisfaction from these learning challenges. When students need to compose, dyslexic students should be encouraged to draw the ideas and construct a mind map, and then write some short sentences if possible. During the lesson, learning activities should be physical and practical because every student has different

strengths, and all of them should have the opportunities to find out what they good at. The examples are discussion, debates, drama, writing, drawing, problem solving, information technology and use of library. As many means of teaching are introduced, teachers should allow students to jot notes or present work in their own ways, e.g. paintings, poems, recordings, etc. SEN students will gain confidence when they can deliver their message successfully to peer. Eventually, SEN students will be easier to be part of the school society and an inclusive culture will be formed.

To conclude, inclusive education is inevitable goal in the path of Hong Kong education development. Although some practical ways that teachers can do in the classroom are suggested, there are many stakeholders in our education system. The policy makers, educationists, schools and parents should also take part in building up an inclusive environment for students. Nevertheless, teachers still are the most influential and direct people in the classroom. The curriculum plan needs to be constructed based on students' interest rather than teachers'. With more training on teachers and other education stakeholders, inclusive education can successfully proceed.

Reference

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