

Experimenting with small class teaching in North Point

Recognising that small class teaching can serve the needs of pupils who depend more on individual attention to support their learning, the AM section of North Point Government Primary School has devised a way of introducing small class teaching for selected pupils, within the existing resources. The school has restructured all classes in primary 4, 5 and 6, so that the five classes at each level are re-mixed to form four bigger classes. From 35 pupils, the size has now increased to around 45 per class. These four classes are further divided into two categories according to their class results. Two classes are made up of pupils with a better academic performance while the other two bring together those with less satisfactory results and are further divided into two small classes of 20 each. By enlarging the size of the former, teachers are freed up for small class teaching of pupils who require additional support in English and maths.

Mr Ho Kwok-suen, headmaster of the school, had carefully weighed up the possible effects of enlarged classes for some and smaller classes for others, before proposing the innovation. He saw the larger classes of better able pupils as providing the school with an opportunity to enable teachers to help pupils who need further consolidation in order to develop.

Although it is still too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, Mr Ho feels that some initial success is evident after a six month trial. With more individual attention and greater opportunities for participation, he sees pupils showing enhanced self-esteem and a more active attitude in their learning. Teachers can monitor the progress of individual pupils more closely as classroom discipline improves and they are able to adjust teaching schedules in order to suit the pace and the needs of particular groups.

Some important lessons can also be learned from the North Point experience, for those thinking of adopting similar practices.

- **Staff consensus is essential**

Although the plan for small class teaching was finally confirmed only a few days before the beginning of the new school term in 2002, Mr Ho had conceived the scheme many years before and planned it carefully. He had worked hard to convince his teachers, and after nine months he finally gained their support.

- **The teaching and learning approach and the syllabus content must be carefully tailored**

Mr Ho feels that teachers need to adopt a more pupil-oriented mode of interactive teaching for small classes. They must get to know the pupils better and tailor their teaching to individual needs.

- **Devise accurate means of assessment**

Small class teaching in the North Point mode depends on a reliable means of differentiating between better able and less able pupils. There should also be a means to measure the impact of the approach on the pupils in the enlarged classes as well as those in the small classes.

- **Relieve the psychological pressure on pupils**

To minimise labelling effects, Mr Ho has come up with the idea of appointing “little tutors” from amongst pupils in the small classes. Even though their class results are less satisfactory compared with their peers, these pupils blossom when they act as tutors to children of primary 1 and 2. Their self-image is greatly enhanced as a result.

(Report of *Joy of Learning* (The Hong Kong Institute of Education), No.1 2003.)