

Home-school Partnership: Parent-child Morning Reading Programme

Jacqueline Shek

Teacher-librarian

Tin Shui Wai Methodist Primary School

Hong Kong

Home-school partnership has been recognized as an important approach to promote student learning since the last century. Though families bear an inevitable role to teach reading at home, teachers and parent volunteers working together at school may motivate those students who are uninterested or less supported by their families to read. The interests of the current readers may also be strengthened. This paper presents a parent-child reading programme adopted in a Hong Kong primary school that engaged parent volunteers to read with the children in the morning. The objectives, the detailed plan and evaluation methods are discussed. After a year of implementation, the P.1 and P.2 students involved had remarkable improvements in various skills such as prediction skills, reading aloud and communication skills. Moreover, it served as a media to promote home-school partnership.

Hong Kong is now in the era of Education Reform and students have to be empowered to learn beyond the confines of the classroom. Under the reform, all students should become information literate.

In the reform document (Curriculum Development Council, 2000), it emphasizes that “Information literacy refers not only to the skills to handle different sorts of information, but also the abilities, competencies, attitudes, and dispositions involved”. It also suggests that schools have to guide students learn to learn through the four key tasks. The four areas are: Reading to Learn, Project Learning, Moral and

Civil Education and Information Technology (Curriculum Development Council, 2001).

Rationale of the Parent-child Morning Reading Programme

According to the Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2001), the features of reading should include:

- Reading is not just for the improvement of language proficiency, but serves many other important purposes, which adds value to the quality of our life.
- Quality reading materials embracing different text-types can be chosen from a wide variety of sources.
- Reading can take place anytime and anywhere.
- Some students will read on their own if they are interested in reading.
- Uninterested readers need to be motivated, supported and taught how to read.

To achieve the above targets, we need the co-operation and collaboration of all parties at school: the teachers, parents and the community. Therefore the co-coordinator of the School and Home Co-operation Scheme, the teacher-librarian and parents of Tin Shui Wai Methodist Primary School formed a committee to plan a reading program named as Parent-child Morning Reading Programme for the P.1 & P.2 students. It was implemented in the P.1 and P.2 classrooms on every Tuesday from 7:45 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. The programme also included activities occurred in other occasions.

After several meetings, the committee determined the plan of this programme as illustrated in the following section.

The Reading Plan: Parent-child Morning Reading Programme

Objectives of the plan

The programme aimed to promote a reading culture and the reading atmosphere in school. Students were expected to develop the skills of reading, writing and self-learning through the support of parent volunteers in small groups. Moreover, they were encouraged to share their ideas in front of the class so as to train their skills of communication and public speaking. Using a large variety of reading materials, their reading interests should be broadened. Since the programme provided an opportunity for the parents to work with the school, a strong culture of collaboration and rapport between teachers and parents would be built.

Personnel and beneficiaries of the plan

The programme mainly served the P.1 and P.2 students as they might need more intensive support from the parents at their language proficiency level. The teacher-librarian was the person-in-charge to coordinate the planning, implementation and evaluation of the programme. With the assistance of the Chinese and English language teachers, the parent volunteers implemented the plan in the classrooms. Therefore the roles and responsibilities were laid out as follows:

Parent Volunteers' role and responsibilities. Each class was divided into small groups. Each group had four students. A parent volunteer had to take care of two small groups. They have to listen to individual's reading and to provide assistance whenever necessary. Being role model of other parents, they could promote parental involvement and support the school reading activities

Subject teacher's roles and responsibilities. The Subject teachers (Chinese or English) acted as instructors and assistants to the parent volunteers. They had to group the students with different abilities before the volunteers served the class. Then they acted as facilitators to cater the needs of students and parents. At the same time, they had to reinforce the reading activities, acted as observers and gave advice to parents for the reading activities. In case of emergency, for example, the emotional problems of students, the teachers had to handle the students. Moreover, they had to make assessment and report to the parents and teacher-librarian and monitor the progress of the reading programme.

Teacher-librarian's roles and responsibilities. As the overall coordinator, the teacher-librarian (TL) had to supervise the whole reading programme. She had to organize the activity, provide the resources needed, e.g. books, assessment forms, students' reading log books and simple book report forms, as well as select books suitable for the students. Other than these, the TL prepared the budget for the whole plan, e.g. souvenirs for the parent volunteers and gifts for the students. Before the parent volunteers served, she had to organize a training programme for the parent volunteers to enhance parents' understanding of 'Reading to Learn' so as to get their support. Last but not the least, the TL administered the issue of certificates and presentation of awards to recognize the effort of the volunteers.

Action plan

The action plan includes nine important steps as follows:

1. Set up the committee.
2. Introduce the objectives to the whole school (including teachers, parents) through meetings and school press publication in order to get their support.
3. Prepare suitable resources such as books and training materials.
4. Recruit parent volunteers through parents meeting, posters and notices.
5. Provide training for the parent volunteers emphasizing their responsibilities, skills in handling the group, skills in conducting the activities, simulating the classroom situation and practising the skills.
6. Prepare the roster.
7. Introduce the parent volunteers to the whole school in the assembly and announce the commencing date.
8. Start the reading programme.
9. Discuss and evaluate after the first meeting with students and give suggestions for improvement.

Recruitment of parent volunteers

Getting the right parents to serve was very crucial to the success of the programme since they were the implementers. In order to instill reading habits among the students, parents needed to have basic reading skills, vocabulary knowledge and love reading. As workers of children, they had to love the students. Since the parents had to serve on every Tuesday, they must be committed and punctual for the morning reading sessions. Nevertheless, it would be the best if parents were flexible in timing so that they could participate in the training workshops and meetings.

The volunteers were recruited in four ways. Propaganda was carried out in Parents-Teachers Association meetings and by posters and notices. Parents were invited through school press and school website. The students were also encouraged to invite their parents. It was hoped that all interested parents were reached by all means. After the recruitment, the right volunteers were selected by interviews and teachers' recommendation.

Training

The training sessions were arranged by the teacher-librarian. She invited experts and social workers to help the parents to build up the team spirit and understand the meaning of volunteer work, to enhance the reading skills such as how to conduct reading aloud and to select books for reading aloud.

Evaluation

The programme was evaluated with the parents and teachers every two months. The enquires were answered and worries were eased in these meetings. The evaluation also aimed at checking the progress of children's reading from time to time. Practices were modified based on the reflection of the implementers and assistants.

Tips for smooth implementation of the programme

Since this programme involved a number of parents and teachers, it was unavoidable to have problems during the course of implementation. Different parties holding various beliefs might influence its effectiveness. Based on the previous experience, it was found that problems have to be handled as soon as they arose. If the parent is found to misbehave, or experience health problem or the job nature is not suitable for him/her, it is better to find another one to replace his/her duty. People's emotions have to be calmed down immediately and hearty discussions are to be carried out. In order to seek improvements and prevent frustrations, parents and teachers need adequate support and encouragement.

Budgeting

Other than arranging the necessary personnel, the school needed to set out a budget to implement such an extensive programme. Financial support to purchase reference books for parents and teachers, certificates of appreciation, souvenirs and other matters was crucial for the successful implementation of the plan.

Reflection

We have learnt that in order to promote an effective reading activity, it demands a lot of resources (time, manpower, facilities, and materials) and support from the personnel involved (principal, teachers, parents and community). A well-designed and detailed plan is essential, especially for the parent training and propaganda of recruiting the volunteers.

We find that this programme helped students to develop reading interest and habit. From the annual report of the library session, it shows that the P.1 and P.2 students increased their abilities in reflection, prediction skills, reading aloud, as well as communication skills. Moreover, it improved parents-child communication and promoted home-school partnership of school.

References

- Curriculum Development Council, (2000), *Learning to learn: The way forward in curriculum development, Consultation document*. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.
- Curriculum Development Council, (2001) *Learning to learn: Life-long learning and whole-person development*, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.
- Epstein, J.L. and Sanders, M.G. (2002) *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.) California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Author Note:

Jacqueline Shek, a member of Hong Kong Teacher Librarians' Association, has shared her working experience with the fellow librarians held by the Education and Manpower Bureau of Hong Kong. She has held workshops about parent training in Hong Kong and Macau. Her major interest lies in developing library programmes that contribute to student learning.