A Day in the Life of a School Library 2013

A Comparative Study across Primary School Libraries in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan

The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation
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30/F, Wyndham Place, 40-44 Wyndham Street, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 3167 4197
Fax: (852) 2877 0434
Website: www.cysff.org
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-A Comparative Study across Primary School Libraries in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan
Prof James Henri
31 October 2013

Introduction

This report is a summary of the research project (design, implementation and findings) funded by the Foundation during 2012-2013. It should be read in conjunction with the PPT presentations for Fuzhou, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The genesis for this project was a discussion in early 2012 about the desirability of having access to some research about school libraries that would inform the participants on the planned Teacher Librarian Certificate course being offered during 2012-2014 for the first time to Hefei schools. A useful but simple research project was seen as desirable and to this end it was determined that a study would be undertaken to look at the Day in a Life scenario across selected primary schools in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Four schools from each were identified as appropriate, one in China with multiple campuses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mainland China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wenquan Elementary School, yunnan</td>
<td>Cheung Chau Sacred Heart school</td>
<td>Binan Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minhang Experimental Primary School(4 campuses), Jiangsu</td>
<td>Ho Lap Primary School</td>
<td>Ren Ai Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chunjiang Center Primary School, Changzhou, Jiangsu</td>
<td>Hong Kong Baptist Convention Primary School</td>
<td>Shimen Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinqiao Experimental Primary School, Changzhou, Jiangsu</td>
<td>Tseung Kwan O Methodist Primary School</td>
<td>Wanxing Elementary School</td>
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Fig.1. Schools that formed the study

A researcher was appointed to coordinate each country. Because of the disparate location of the China schools additional local coordinators were appointed. I managed the entire project. Originally it was anticipated that the project would take about 4 months but inevitable delays pushed this out to almost 11 months. The project is now complete
and presentations have been made in Fuzhou (the International Conference of Chinese Teacher Librarians), Taiwan (2), and Hong Kong. It is expected that a presentation will be made in Hefei in February 2014 and it is hoped that international exposure will be gained via a presentation at the IASL Conference in Moscow in August 2014. It is anticipated that the research will be published in peer reviewed journals in English and Chinese during 2014.

Methodology

The research was undertaken as a series of case studies which identified what each Teacher Librarian actually spent their time doing, and how the school library was actually used, during a single school day. Such a study cannot hope to be comprehensive because no single school day is exactly representative of what happens during a longer period such as a month but such a large scale project was beyond the available resources. In addition such a qualitative study cannot expect to produce results that are reproducible or generalizable but findings can be used as exemplars and guideposts for action. Again this did not matter, as the purpose of the study was to provide a window into actual practice that would inform the professional development of Hefei teacher librarians in training.

The theoretical model that informed the study was the role of the teacher librarian statement that was developed by the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau in 2001 as a key component of the Hong Kong curriculum reforms of that decade. Figure 2 below is a visual representation of the model. For the purposes of this study the levels of service were numbered 1-5 with 5 being the ultimate level. This model was chosen because the time of its design was somewhat similar to the current situation in Hefei where there is an emerging interest in reading and the development of school library facilities that inform reading and a more student focussed curriculum. In addition it is the only model of its kind known to the author that was developed for a Chinese context. A disadvantage of the model is that it was designed prior to the explosion of digital technologies and so it does not do justice to this. Again this was not a particular problem because in Hefei few libraries incorporate digital technologies.

The study can be conveniently separated into four component parts, namely:

Part 1

• A map of what happens in the school library on a Wednesday from the beginning to the end of the school day.

• A map of TL activity at school (on Wednesday).
  – from arrival to departure (regardless of where she is in the school).
  – If the TL is part time then the record would include what she does when she is not TL.
  – If there is more than one TL (or other significant actors in the school library) then that was also recorded.

• The day was divided into a schedule such as the timetable, for example:08:00-08:40, 08:40-09:20, 09:20-10:00.
Part 2

- A code of everything that happens against a matrix of what might be expected to happen in a very good school library and by a very good teacher librarian.

- Used a modified matrix developed by Hong Kong Education Bureau

- 5 levels of activity are given in the matrix: The bottom Level is coded as 1 and the top Level as 5.
  - The matrix used in this study acts as a theoretical benchmark that shows potential and exemplary practice. It does not provide any guidance as to the percentage of time that ought to be allocated to certain practices.
  - The study revealed, from inside selected schools, actual performance against the matrix. This provides guidance about what is practicable and provides potential pathways for other schools wishing to improve their practice.

**Students Learn to Learn**

Integrate the teaching of information skills across KLA subjects

Conduct a variety of reading programmes

Involve parents and external partners

Collaborative teaching and training information skills

Become involved in the planning and design of the school curriculum and in promoting reading habits

Develop curriculum-focused collections to support learning and promote reading

Participate in some teaching activities

Conduct library lesson

Provide general information for teaching

Operate basic library services

Support reading schemes

Book-purchase Cataloguing Book-lending

Impact on curriculum development and learning outcome

Collaboration with T,L(T,L)

Resource-based learning

Support basic learning and teaching needs

Seek enhancement

P - Principal, parents
T - Teachers
S - Students

TL - Teacher Librarian
CPT - Collaborative Planning and Teaching

Teacher-librarian’s involvement in learning is minimal

**Fig. 2. A matrix of the teacher librarian’s role**
**Part 3**

- An analysis of the school infrastructure that enables/inhibits best practice, including school policies, time table arrangements, access to the library, principal support, training.

**Part 4**

- An analysis of external enablers and inhibitors, including parent attitudes and support, local education authority support and policy, NGO support, availability of quality bookshops.

**Results**

Pie charts of the results from the schools can be seen below as can a nominal average pie chart for each of the regions. A clear pattern can be seen from these that shows that Hong Kong provides the most complex examples, followed by Taiwan, with China providing a picture dominated by a static concentration of attention at level 1 service. In addition the existence of the category “other” is informing as this shows what the researchers identified as “down time” or time spent in meetings, teaching an unrelated subject and so on. Clearly the larger the slab of time spent in “other” the lesser the commitment to the library that was possible.
China Pie Charts

The result of 4 campuses of one school
Average of all school in Mainland China

Average of all school in Taiwan

Average of all school in Hong Kong
Enablers and inhibitors

The results showed that the factors under the control of the school that enabled best practice were:

1. Quality of Teacher librarian (selection, mentoring, leadership);
2. Principal support: Understanding and sharing the role, moral support, Full Time allocation, support staff, library automation, whole school access to the library, E-learning platform, policy, funding, reward for reading and enquiry culture;
3. Teacher understanding and collegiality;
4. Location and design of the library: Refurbishment plan; Ground Floor show case;
5. Administrative arrangements: Time Tables that are attractive to deep learning; Access to ongoing professional development; Automation, Access to the library, the use of E-learning platform.

The results showed that the factors that enabled best practice but were outside school control included: TL Training Program; Local Education Authority support including, understanding of library issues; funding; learning to learn philosophy; reading; library development; staffing; library design and refurbishment; enlightened monitoring and appraisal tools’ active professional TL Association; NGO funding and expertise; parent power; quality bookshops (and ability to access them); library networks (products, services, bibliographic records); access to online bookstores.

Inhibitors to the best use of the teacher librarian included: examination culture (emphasis on memory); textbook culture (lack of choice); poor understanding of professional role (especially at the District level); vision of library as a store room; poor connection between reading and learning; lack of funding; poor location; lack of parent support at home; lack of Internet access at home; lack of locally published quality books; limited support from Education Authority; lack of creativity; intrusion of non-library tasks into the TL’s day; PT allocation; lack of clerical/other library support; old and inadequate collections; emphasis on library as a store room for multiple copies (usually textbooks); arrival of huge quantities of badly selected books swamping library energy; failure to recognize the power of reading.
Key take outs

A key take out from this project includes the need to understand that a library is more than a storeroom. The library can be defined as a room or as an idea and in the worst case the library is a mere warehouse. Embracing new thinking about the library as an idea rather than thinking about it as a room enables a school to spread the library into every corner of the school- classrooms, staffrooms, activity centres, stairwells, corridors, outside spaces, even outside the front gate- and thereby greatly expand its influence on school life. A quality library provides both physical and intellectual access to information in all forms, and it provides safety and happiness.

Another important take out is understanding that the TL is a teacher whose subjects are recreational reading and reading to learn. This provides key school-wide responsibilities including:

• To inject information into every aspect of school life whether for enjoyment or for formal learning;
• To educate teachers about information and to partner with them to deliver student centred learning environments;
• Working in all parts of the school;
• Ensuring that the library is open even when the TL is not there;
• Provision and training of student librarians;
• The involvement of parents and other support staff as library “workers” enables the TL to leave the library open when she is absent; and
• Teachers must be readers if a school wants a reading culture.
Key Findings

- The more time spent at Level 5, the bigger the TLs influence (This requires a FT allocation + clerical support).
- The TL who spends considerable time outside the library will enhance the reading and enquiry culture.
- Principal support is paramount.
- A strong collaborative teacher who loves learning is likely to make a good TL.
- Don’t ask about the size of the collection. Ask how it matches student and teacher interest and how well it supports the curriculum.
- Saturation of the school with quality books (and providing good access to them) is a key to the creation of a reading culture.
- A closed library is worse than no library.
- Don’t overemphasize bibliographic control; place emphasis on putting information into the clients hands.

Suggested future research

Undertake the same study in Macau.

Additional probing could be undertaken to surface WHY experienced/exemplary TLs do what they do, and also to explore HOW they prioritise their tasks.