A Day in the Life of a School Library 2015

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

The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation
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The comparison

The chart below provides a snap shot of the comparative analysis of the four regions. Understanding the comparisons is only possible if certain factors are considered and these include:

**Hong Kong**

1. There is a long history of school library development in both Taiwan and Hong Kong.
2. Hong Kong has a long history of significant compulsory training for teacher librarians and each school has a mandated teacher librarian position. In theory the vast majority of those positions are full time, but the reality is that principals often load their teacher librarians with a range of additional duties, including subject teaching, which has the effect of reducing the role to a part time or very part time one. Many schools supplement the work of the teacher librarian with paid clerical assistants, but this is more conspicuous at the secondary level.

**Taiwan**

3. Taiwan has a history of training for teacher librarians although this is less structured than that offered in Hong Kong. The position of teacher librarian is rarely full time but many schools appoint additional staff (including librarians) to assist the management of the school library.

**Mainland China**

4. The situation in China is inconsistent with some Districts offering compulsory training and mandating appointment of teacher librarians while other Districts offer little or no support. Normally any training is library related rather than teaching related which results in a service orientation towards Levels 1 and 2 on the scale. It is expected that the forthcoming research in Hefei will provide a more advanced spread of activity. The offering of a professional training program and the appointment of teacher librarians together with the building of substantial and attractive libraries is expected to show a stronger role for teacher librarians at the higher levels.
Macau does not appoint teacher librarians. The position of Reading Promoter is the closest position. These staff have some basic training in reading but little in the way of teacher librarianship. Reading promoters are not teachers. Principals can assign their duties as required by each school. It is unlikely that schools will provide clerical support to the reading promotion staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Librarian / Reading Promotion Staff (Macau) Activity Level and Description (CDC, EDB, HKSAR, 2002)</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Macau</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 5</strong></td>
<td>Integrate the teaching of information skills across Key Learning Area subjects; Conduct a variety of reading programs; Involve parents and external partners.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4</strong></td>
<td>Collaborative teaching and training information skills; Become involved in the planning and design of the school curriculum and in promoting reading habits.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td>Develop curriculum-focused collections to support learning and promote reading; Participate in some teaching activities.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>Conduct library lesson; Provide general information for teaching.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>Operate basic library services; Support reading schemes; Book-purchase, Cataloguing, Book-lending.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Work.</strong></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>123%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarities and differences (explained by the inverse pyramid; CDC, EDB, HKSAR, 2002) in the 4 research regions Similarities and differences (explained by the inverse pyramid; CDC, EDB, HKSAR, 2002) in the 4 research regions

Students Learn to Learn

Integrate the teaching of information skills across KLA subjects
Conduct a variety of reading programmes
Involves 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 outcomes
Collaboration with L.S(CPT)
Resource-based learning
Support basic learning and teaching needs
Seek enhancement

Teacher-librarian’s involvement in learning is minimal

P - Principal, parents
T - Teachers
S - Students
TL - Teacher Librarian
CPT - Collaborative Planning and Teaching
The distribution of all levels of teacher librarian activity is the most even in Hong Kong, followed by Taiwan, then China. The distribution is the most uneven in Macau. The highest teacher librarian activity in each of the 4 regions is clustered at level 1 (141%), followed by other work (123%), then level 5 (56%), 2 (36%) and 3 (24%) respectively. The lowest of the activity areas is level 4 (20%).

Other work

Both Taiwan and Macau staff have the most (34%) work not related to the library while their Chinese and Hong Kong counterparts have less (27% and 28% respectively) allocated to other work.

It should be noted that other work could mean either: legitimate work not covered by the inverse pyramid, or illegitimate work; that is work that diverts attention from the school library. However, conversation with the interviewees suggested that for the most part other work fell into the illegitimate category, and was a drain on the mission of the school library.

Level 1

Most (57%) of the Chinese activity is at level 1 including: operating basic library services, supporting reading schemes, book purchasing, cataloguing and book lending. These are very much library related and largely clerical and this predominance at level 1 also means that the teacher librarian is almost always stationed in the library (at the circulation desk) expecting clients to come there. The teacher librarian’s involvement in learning is minimal.

The Macau staffs spend the second most time (49%) on such activities. The teacher librarians in Taiwan (19%) and Hong Kong (16%) perform proportionately much less at this lower level of service.

Level 2

The Taiwan teacher librarians perform the most (19%) at level 2 which includes conducting library lessons and providing general information for teaching. These are characterized as supporting basic learning and teaching needs. The teachers and students approach the teacher librarian when there are such needs. The Macau staff commit the least time (2%) to these activities.

Level 3

The Chinese teacher librarians perform the most (8%) at level 3. This includes activities such as developing curriculum-focused collections to support learning and promoting reading, and participating in some teaching (not subject) activities. These indicate evidence of some resource-based and enquiry learning. The teacher librarians initiate collaboration with teachers and students.
Taiwan commits the least time (4%) to such activities. Both Hong Kong and Macau commit 6% of time at this level. The actual time spent on level 4 is very low across all regions and the difference between the 4 regions for this type of activity is insignificant.

**Level 4**

The Hong Kong teacher librarians spend the most time (9%) on level 4 activities including collaborative teaching and training of information skills; involvement in the planning and design of the school curriculum and in promoting reading habits. These are measures of collaboration with teachers and students. The teacher librarian collaboratively plans, teaches and evaluates library programs with teachers.

Both China and Macau commit the least time (3%) to such activities. Taiwan commits 5% of time to such activities.

**Level 5**

The Hong Kong teacher librarians commit the most time (31%) to level 5 the activities of integrating the teaching of information skills across key learning areas (subjects), conducting a variety of reading programs and involving parents and external partners in the library program. These activities are most likely to have a major impact on curriculum development and on student learning outcomes. The principal, parents, teachers and teacher librarian collaborate for the benefit of students. Students are given opportunities to learn how to learn.

Chinese teacher librarians never achieve this involvement. The Taiwan teacher librarians commit less time (19%) to such activities. Macau interviewees spend the least time (6%) on such activities.
What explains the position of Macau school libraries when compared with their cousins in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan?

The single most obvious issue is that there is no position of Teacher Librarian in Macau schools. The subjects of this research are in fact Reading Promoters not librarians, nor are they appointed as teachers. Reading promoters have some rudimentary training in reading promotion and do in fact have the opportunity to attend some training offered through the Direccao dos Servicos de Educacao e Juventude and the Macau Library and Information Management Association, they are not required to be credentialled. If a reading promoter is a certified teacher then this would be by way of a happy circumstance but is not a requirement.

In 2007/2008, the Direccao dos Servicos de Educacao e Juventude launched a reading promotion staff subsidy program. The purpose was to carry out types of reading activities, promote reading among the campuses, cultivate student reading habits, strengthen the management of reading in classrooms and reduce the non-teaching duties of the teaching staff. (It should be noted that encouraging reading is regarded as a non-teaching duty in Macau where as in most jurisdictions this would be a mainstream teaching focus in primary schools.) However, because of the limited human resources responsible for school library departments, they failed to provide much support for schools. Furthermore, the work and role of the reading promotion staff varies between schools and is often outside their specific remit. The staff themselves advised that they are often asked to take administrative work beyond their core duties. The below indicates the training that the reading staff receive.

3.7.2. Professional Development:

3.7.2.1 2011-2012, certificate course jointly organized by University of Macau Centre for Continuing Education and Macau Library and Information Management Association, about 180 hours.

3.7.2.2 2011-2012 Seed Teacher led by Children Reading Club Training Course by the Direccao dos Servicos de Educacao e Juventude (47 hours)

3.7.2.3 Teaching Writing Workshop (12 hours)

3.7.3. In-service Training: Part-time, large and small seminars, workshops and visits (about 20 times)

3.7.4. Professional exchanges: participate in international library exchange meetings and seminars (5-6 times)
One cannot be confident that the training above would actually equip the staff for their intended role. It certainly does not equip them to meet the requirements as laid out in the inverse pyramid model we have used in this study.

The reading promotion staff are one of the 5 special staff (Leisure Activity Staff, School Medical Staff, Laboratory Administrator, Reading Promotion Staff and Information Technology Education Staff) provided by the government for each school.

If their role was confined to reading promotion they might have hope of success. However they are expected to be able to manage a school library, despite the lack of status or salary. At the same time it is clear that at least some reading promoters are expected to act as relief when teachers are absent. Again this is a duty for which they are neither credentialed nor for which they are appropriate, but such duties do take them away from their primary function.

The research on status also shines a light on the lack of influence that the reading promoters have in school. They are not teachers and therefore are regarded as staff of inferior rank by teaching staff and students alike. In addition their jobs are insecure which tends to mean that they keep a low profile. Decisions that affect the library and the value of the reading promoters seem to be made by teachers and administrators without consultation regarding the impact that they might have.

The above points to the second impediment; namely the relationship between the principal (and other senior staff) and the reading promoter. It was clear from the study that relationships between these personnel were at best strained and at worst dysfunctional. Lip service was given to the strength of the relationship with reading promoters praising the support they receive from their principal. But the reality was that there was little to support this position. Certainly there was no evidence of professional respect which is essential when there is little understanding by the school leadership about the role and potential influence of a junior member of staff.

The third major impediment is the lack of a formal qualification available in Macau to train teacher librarians. This means that the incumbents are often out of their depth in terms of decisions that are made. Expectations about the role of the library and the development of a reading culture are therefore low. The lack of training together with the lack of status means that the reading promoters are unlikely to have opportunity to work with teachers, beyond a very low service role. It is hypothesized that the lack of training and appointment of teacher librarians is a deliberate cost saving measure. The global research evidence suggests that this is very counter-productive.
The fourth impediment is ignorance about the potential for school improvement and for better learning outcomes that are a direct result of a strong library headed by a full time professional teacher librarian. This is exacerbated by the lack of a strong relationship between principals and reading promoters. The research on this is clear: a strong principal teacher librarian relationship ensures the success of the development of a reading and enquiry culture.

Although the study did not collect data on library budgets and collection development policy and practice it is suggested that it is likely that budgeting for collection development is at the low end and it is likely that there is a lack of expertise regarding selection of books suitable for the library collection. There was no evidence that children are actively involved in choice of purchase. It is also likely that there are restrictions on what can be purchased from what book suppliers. These matters deserve further investigation.

Conclusion of the region as a whole

The study identifies many positive developments across the region. Each part has its own strengths and challenges. Certainly the bureaucracies are committed to improvement with some more successful than others. The need for appropriate training is recognised. The region would benefit enormously from a rigorous comparative research program that enables decision makers to base their funding and policy decisions on credible findings. Where there is a strong and informed professional body supporting the work of teacher librarians there is greater opportunity for professional development and advocacy.

As demand for an emphasis on reading and in particular on reading for pleasure becomes mainstream, then the providers of books would respond. This is demonstrated in the change in publishing for children and young adults and in the remarkable changes in the look and feel of bookshops.

Recommendations for the region as a whole

Sharing policy and practice across the region is important and valuable and it is recommended that the education authorities take the initiative to ensure this is possible.

Hong Kong has an excellent set of policies with respect to school libraries (which are unfortunately often ignored). These could act as exemplars across the region.
The library collection ought to be evaluated in terms of reader interest and use by teachers in their planning. Multiple copies should be minimized and outdated and uninteresting books discarded. Involving children in the selection of titles is important. It would be good to see more comics and graphic novels in collections.

A good collection is of little value if children don’t borrow. Schools must maximize the opportunity for children to read in the library.

Teachers should be rewarded for their use of the library.

The best school libraries are exciting spaces. The display of books is compelling. The furniture is comfortable and varied. The library must be the best space in the school.

Mentoring of new professionals is also important as they are almost always without a knowledgeable supervisor within their own school. The appointment of a coach to library and reading staff across a group of schools could be considered.

What can be done?

At the system level consideration should be given to changing policies to better underpin the power of reading. All the evidence suggests that the best way to enable literacy is to free children to read compelling books: books that the children, not the adults, find compelling. Essentially what is required is a set of policies regarding school libraries and reading similar to those developed in Hong Kong but with added attention to monitoring of their implementation. Consistent with policy renewal is a need to fund the application of those policies…staffing, resources, collections.

Change at this level needs advocacy from lobby groups. The professional library association, reading association, publishers groups, parent groups, and those interested in good educational outcomes (including the teacher educators), must present a cogent and coherent argument for the need for change, and this requires evidence from outside Macau as well as from within Macau. A summit of these groups about this need would be a first step.

In addition to the above, or indeed in the absence of the above, there are things that the teachers and principals can do (and should do) now to improve the situation. Such things can include:
Schools

& Schools could initiate a campaign to harness parent power in primary schools where parents could demand a much better reading environment and take a lead role in delivering that.

& The Library Association could mount a major campaign for school library renewal. This could include mentoring to the schools about the ways to make an attractive library space and to create a whole school reading culture.

& Publishers (and others) can enhance opportunity for authors to get into schools to share their craft and to hook children into the power and enjoyment of reading.

Principals

& Principals could appoint Reading Support Staff on a full time basis and ensure that they have a status equivalent to that of a teacher.

& Principals could ensure that the library space is attractive and available to teachers and students throughout the entire day.

& Principals should mandate a daily period of sustained silent reading, teacher read-alouds, and free voluntary reading.

& Principals should enable a celebration of learning from reading and never treat reading as a means to a comprehension or grammar test.

& Principals could reward those teachers who make good use of the library to underpin and to enhance their classes.

& Principals could shift their resourcing of social media to a support of media that enhances reading. Goodreads.com is an example.

& Principals could cooperate with neighbouring schools by supporting reading week and other social events that celebrate reading.

& Principals could ensure that the whole school is dressed as a celebration of reading.

& Principals could read to children every day.
Teachers
& Teachers could ensure that they communicate with library staff about new books, and their need for books to support certain subject themes and topics.

& Teachers could spend time in the library each day.

& Teachers could dress their classrooms with book themes and enable reading in their classrooms.

& Foundations, such as CYSFF, could reach out to primary schools in Macau and show them what can be achieved.

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