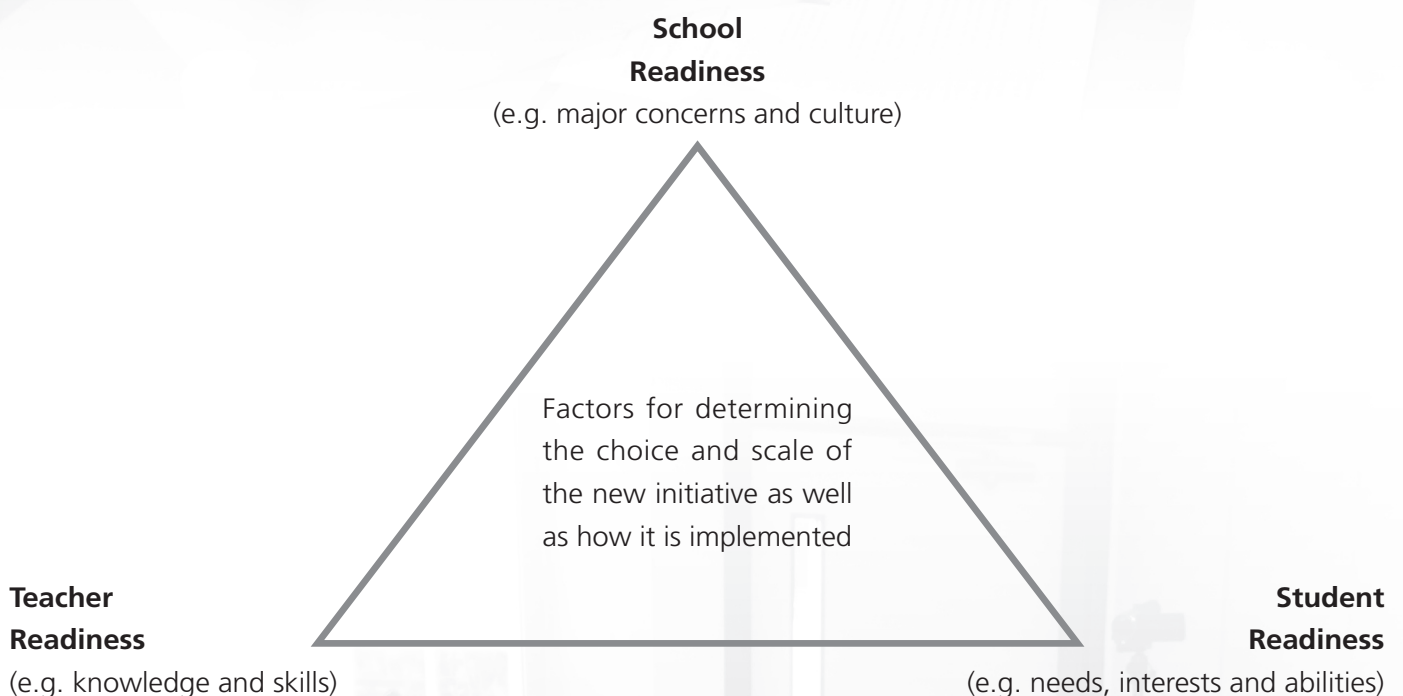


Preparing our students for the 21st century through ongoing curriculum renewal

Introduction

Schools are encouraged to incorporate the Major Renewed Emphases (MRE) of the ongoing curriculum development into their English Language Education curricula. Yet when they implement a new initiative, it is of paramount importance to conduct an analysis of the readiness of the school, teachers and students to ensure that the new strategies are adopted in an integral and holistic manner. With careful consideration of various related factors, schools are more likely to make informed decisions on the most appropriate new initiative to pilot and to successfully implement it as illustrated in the diagram below.



In these two years, our collaborating schools have actively responded to the updated curriculum reform by focusing on some of the MRE. They have successfully enriched their students' learning experiences, fostered school, curriculum and teacher development; and generated valuable experiences in implementing different curriculum innovations. Their practices are conceptualised under the following five themes.

1. Becoming future ready – Promoting self-directed learning and life planning education

i. Developing future-focused curriculum that embraces self-directed learning

What must schools be doing today so that their students can tackle new situations and problems in the future? The best way is to embrace a forward-thinking vision in designing the school curriculum. In order to prepare students for the future challenges, it is important to develop their self-directed learning skills so as to enable them to constantly acquire new knowledge and capabilities. Teachers can provide their

students with more opportunities to regularly reflect on their learning needs, set personal learning goals, identify appropriate learning resources and strategies to attain the goals, self-monitor and self-evaluate their learning progress and outcomes. Case 3.1 offers a good example of how teachers progressively developed their P4-6 students' self-learning skills so that they could become independent writers. Case 3.2 demonstrates that with systematic scaffolding and effective use of learning portfolios, even less proficient junior secondary students could be empowered to take increasing charge of their learning. In Case 3.3, students were given considerable learner autonomy – they devised their own plans and career goals, and also employed an e-tool for their independent reading.

ii. Creating a learning environment to broaden students' interests and career pathways through life planning education

Without a good understanding of their strengths, weaknesses and interests, or knowledge about educational and vocational options, it is less likely that students will be able to set a clear study or career goal and achieve personal fulfillment in their lives. It is advisable for schools to incorporate life planning education into their school curriculum at an early stage and provide a supportive learning environment for students to explore their interests or think more deeply about their academic and career pathways. Case 3.3 illustrates how teachers incorporated life planning education components such as self-understanding and development, career exploration and career planning and management into their unit design, and also used a range of stimulating activities to help their students understand themselves and their study or career aspirations.

2. Fostering reflective learning and teaching – Promoting assessment literacy

i. Promoting "Assessment for Learning"

Apart from relying on summative assessment which mainly measures attainment, schools embed "Assessment for Learning" practices in daily teaching to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses in learning and make continuous improvement. By using student learning evidence gathered from different sources, teachers are able to more objectively review and adjust their teaching objectives, plans and strategies. Case 3.4 illustrates how teachers made use of a range of assessment data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in writing and enhance the support provided to less motivated students. Targeted strategies such as integrating technology into lessons to facilitate teachers to give timely feedback and fostering a "growth mindset" to help students develop perseverance in writing were adopted.

ii. Promoting "Assessment as Learning"

Building on the experience gained from the implementation of "Assessment for Learning" and responding to the needs of the future, schools are recommended to further enhance the effectiveness of assessment by adopting "Assessment as Learning" practices so as to foster students' metacognitive strategies such as reflecting on their learning performance and strategies adopted. While teachers in Cases 3.5 and 3.6 also made use of various kinds of assessment data to inform curriculum planning, diversified types of assessment, including self-, peer, teacher and/or parent assessment, were introduced in the writing programmes to enrich the variety of feedback students received on their own performance. Meaningful homework and writing portfolios were designed to enable students to develop various self-directed learning strategies such as evaluating their own performance, setting improvement goals, and using appropriate resources to support or enrich their learning.

3. Keeping up with the latest trends in education technology – Promoting e-learning

i. Supporting student learning outside the classroom

e-Learning, as an open learning mode, allows students to participate in learning activities beyond the limitations of place and time. It offers immense opportunities for broadening students' horizons and enhancing their abilities to communicate, collaborate and construct knowledge. Case 3.7 is an example of a school with a significant number of cross-border and newly-arrived students, in which teachers exploited self-access learning management systems in order to maximise students' learning opportunities outside the classroom and the territory.

ii. Enhancing learning effectiveness in the classroom

The goal of using IT in teaching is not to present the learning content in class, but to promote interactive learning and increase learning effectiveness. Adopting e-learning strategies entails a much deeper implication than merely having students use laptop computers and apps in the learning and teaching process, but should instead involve redesigning learning tasks and redefining learning possibilities and outcomes. Case 3.8 showcases how the benefits of IT could be harnessed to foster students' confidence and skills in speaking and listening – the two language skills teachers believed their students had fewer opportunities to develop in conventional technology-free lessons. Case 3.9 illustrates how teachers promoted e-learning progressively by adopting the SAMR (**S**ubstitution, **A**ugmentation, **M**odification, and **R**edefinition) model with a view to enhancing students' language learning and transforming their learning by developing such lifelong learning capabilities as creativity, collaboration and independent learning. In both cases, the paradigm of teachers' roles shifted from being transmitters of knowledge to becoming facilitators of learning, especially with the help of e-tools that provide instant results for timely feedback.

4. Breaking the subject boundaries – Promoting Reading across the Curriculum and STEM education

i. Facilitating KLA collaboration through Reading across the Curriculum

"Reading to learn: Towards Reading across the Curriculum (RaC)" is one of the renewed Four Key Tasks recommended for implementation at schools. Our students need reading skills in different Key Learning Areas (KLAs). All KLA teachers can contribute positively to their students' literacy development. Schools can leverage different KLA teachers' efforts in implementing RaC so as to reinforce their students' ability in reading to learn, and enable them to see coherent links across subjects. Case 3.10 shows how English and content subject teachers made joint efforts in fostering reading to learn skills among their students. Multimodal texts were used and text features and structures were explicitly taught to students. In Case 3.11, a primary and a secondary school jointly implemented a Cross-key Stage RaC Buddy Reading Programme to develop primary students' strategies in reading non-fiction texts and secondary students' lifelong learning skills. Teachers in Case 3.12 demonstrated how to include a variety of reading texts such as STEM-related texts to help their students cope with their reading in different content subjects.

ii. Implementing RaC in support of STEM education

Are literacy skills development and STEM (**S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics) education two separate and unrelated curriculum areas? Some of our collaborating schools have tried to integrate the two areas by implementing RaC in support of STEM education. Teachers in Cases 3.10 and 3.11

introduced a good variety of STEM-related texts to increase students' exposure to related vocabulary and text features. STEM-related elements were also infused into units and modules to develop students' critical thinking and problem solving skills, spark their curiosity about STEM and ultimately foster their innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. English and STEM-related content subject teachers collaborated closely to help students generate creative STEM-related learning products. In Case 3.10, primary English teachers worked with General Studies and Mathematics teachers to promote STEM education, placing emphasis on entrepreneurial spirit in their cross-curricular units. Students were therefore able to inject much creativity into their own inventions. Case 3.12 illustrates how teachers spiced up junior secondary students' reading by arousing their interest in STEM through using a variety of STEM-related books for extensive reading, and designed tasks that help students develop creativity and problem solving skills.

5. Building and sustaining capacity for professional development – Promoting curriculum leadership development

i. Creating a climate and preparing the whole team for change

Leading change does not only require the curriculum leaders (CLs) to possess sound subject cum pedagogical knowledge, but also effective change management strategies. As CLs, they can create a climate for change by establishing a sense of urgency, forming a coalition for implementation as well as creating a vision for change among the coalition members. Case 3.13 presents how the CLs of a school identified the curriculum innovations to be implemented in the English Department, based on which study groups were formed for all teachers to explore and exchange relevant ideas. They were also equipped with the essential capabilities to put theories into practice. The CLs in Case 3.14 addressed school and student needs through adopting a progressive approach to implementation by engaging only some teachers at the beginning of the project and creating a positive snowball effect on the rest of the team to encourage further implementation.

ii. Engaging and enabling the whole team to implement and sustain change

With the tone for change set among teachers who have been equipped with the essential knowledge and skills, schools also need to create a favourable environment for the strategic implementation and institutionalisation of the new initiative. Apart from the administrative support from the school management, specific and targeted professional and pedagogical support from subject-based CLs is also crucial in the course of development. The two cases reveal how the CLs have helped nurture a constructive rapport among teachers to conduct holistic curriculum planning (Case 3.13) and supported teachers to try out self-directed learning strategies (Case 3.14).

Conclusion

We are delighted to find that schools have been responding proactively to the ongoing curriculum renewal by implementing different new emphases to prepare students to succeed in a knowledge-based, technologically advanced and increasingly globalised world. We hope that the cases presented here will give readers an idea of how schools are developing a more holistic and student-centred approach to curriculum planning and task design, and how they are adapting the school-based curriculum to cater for the needs of different students.