

## CHANGING SCHOOLS, CHANGING TEACHERS

La Salle Primary School

In line with the recent school improvement policies, there has been a significant shift of emphasis from effective schools to quality schools, and then to learning organisations. High priority is accorded in SMI (School Management Initiative) and ECR7 (Education Commission Report No. 7) to the professional development of principals, teachers and other key participants. It enables educators to see how the world has changed and then change their work accordingly.

### Teacher Development: The Critical Component of Restructuring

Our highly proactive teachers continuously take undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in subject knowledge, teaching pedagogy and management skills. We are very fortunate to have such dedicated staff members. They give up their weekends or after school hours for self initiated personal and professional growth, which is central to a learning organisation.

The chairpersons of all teams and subjects have started to take the initiative to:

1. Organise school-based seminars on core topics or new curriculum guides
2. Keep teachers informed of all professional development activities conducted by outside organisations
3. Discuss ideas gained at workshops during staff and panel meetings
4. Disseminate key messages gained in seminars through our School Intranet

The culture of sharing and learning reached its zenith when we joined the two-year “Transforming Schools into Learning Organisations” project run by the School Development and Evaluation Team of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Members of our School Improvement Team, who attended the course, took turns to share insights with other staff members during staff meetings, and to be the facilitators or speakers of school-based workshops. Themes of workshops conducted by the Team include:

1. School self evaluation
2. Quality student work
3. Vision and mission
4. Guidelines for discipline
5. Virtues of Lasallian teachers

We are not experts or professors in the above disciplines. We are not qualified to teach our colleagues. We only dare to ask, discuss, research, facilitate and initiate the collaborative learning process.

### Learning Outcomes: The Core of Educational Reforms

According to the EMB, their primary concern is to collaborate with schools to bring about improved learning outcomes.

We believe that “changes in teaching and learning approaches” should be the ultimate aim of all reforms. Students, who are the receivers of education, should benefit from the school restructuring process to make all efforts worthwhile.

With the introduction of the NET (Native English Teacher) Scheme several years ago, we have started to conduct English panel meetings in English, and then the Putonghua panel meetings in Putonghua. The impact has been very strong. All language teachers are aware of the importance of authentic language and have started to use English and Putonghua as the medium of communication even outside classrooms. Annual English Language Camps and Putonghua Days have been organised since then.

Shifting the focus of staff meetings from administrative to an emphasis on learning and teaching provides time for discussing instructions or reviewing current research, and is a proactive way to raise student scores. We have tried to minimise the number of staff meetings held. Many messages or reminders to staff members have been replaced by Intranet e-mails or e-notices. Staff meetings are usually for urgent or important matters, which require the consensus of all. Topics on learning and teaching that have been added to and discussed during our staff meetings are:

1. Cooperative learning
2. Collaborative lesson preparation
3. Classroom observation
4. Classroom management
5. Reading habit promotion
6. The qualities of good teachers in the 21st century

“Good quality teaching” minimises learning differences, and is the best approach to boost scores and improve learning performance.

### Learning Communities

At the very centre of the school’s work is the individual child. It is we educators, major players and change agents in schools, who are able to restructure learning and teaching, and make a difference to learning outcomes.

According to Peter Senge, change is only sustainable if it involves learning.

Let us all reflect and rethink, then all schools can be world-class learning communities.