3.0 Optimising the school English Language curricula to foster students' whole-person development

Introduction

The Final Report on Review of School Curriculum published in September 2020 puts forward six directional recommendations for schools to develop a more rigorous and forward-looking curriculum that aims at enhancing students' capacity to cope with the rapid changes and developments locally and globally. These recommendations reinforce the paramount importance of whole-person development through according higher priority to values education and creating space to cater for students' diverse abilities, interests and aspirations, with a view to enabling our students to become diverse talents and future leaders in society. In these two years, many of our collaborating schools have responded to the relevant recommendations by incorporating values education and Life Planning Education into their school English Language curricula to foster students' whole-person development. Schools have also made good use of learning time by designing diversified life-wide learning activities that promote students' lifelong learning, problem solving capabilities and balanced growth to enable them to become future-ready. These schools' good practices are conceptualised under the following four themes:

1. **Broadening and enriching students' learning experiences through Language/Reading across the Curriculum**

   With rigid subject boundaries in a school curriculum, it is hard for students to discern the connections across disciplines to gain richer learning experiences. How can teachers help students realise the links between language and non-language subjects? Language/Reading across the Curriculum (LaC/RaC) is invariably a strong common thread that runs through the school curriculum and provides students with more holistic learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Through LaC/RaC, students can learn through an interdisciplinary lens and better connect their learning in different subject contexts. Reading of multidisciplinary texts also widens students' reading experiences and horizons. In LaC/RaC projects, elements of STEM education can be included to spark innovations and creative thinking among students and provide them with opportunities for hands-on experiences such as making and presenting STEM products. In the RaC project in Case 3.1, there were diversified learning experiences for P1 students to explore animals and body parts. The project culminated in a life-wide learning activity that fostered students' physical and aesthetic development: P1 students designed an animal face mask of their choice and made movements to imitate those of an animal. Case 3.2 illustrates how students' reading experiences were broadened through enhanced exposure to interdisciplinary texts. Their positive values and attitudes were also developed through reading texts on values-laden themes. Case 3.3 demonstrates a good example of how students integrated STEM-related knowledge and skills to design solar water purifiers in attempt to solve a pressing real-life problem: saving of energy in daily life. The engineering design process was adopted in the unit design in which students asked questions, planned, created and improved their prototypes for their deep learning.

2. **Realising the potential of students with diverse characteristics and learning needs**

   To cater for learner diversity, teachers need to adopt a variety of learning and teaching strategies to provide students with different pathways to acquire the learning content, to process or make sense of new information and ideas, and to apply and demonstrate their learning in meaningful and authentic contexts. This can be achieved through revamping the curriculum to enhance lesson effectiveness and incorporating co-curricular and/or life-wide learning activities with a view to connecting learning to real-life situations. Case 3.4 demonstrates how the learning of cross-border upper primary students could be supported through adopting a structured framework that fostered their individual and peer development, enhanced a sense of belonging to their own class and the school as well as helped build in them a better understanding of the community and society. As demonstrated in Case 3.5, teachers also made effective use of the lesson time released in the optimisation of the four senior secondary core subjects to foster students' whole-person development by extending their learning time through designing self-directed learning projects in the English Language subject and offering co-curricular interest courses for students' free choice. Case 3.6 depicts how teachers stretched the writing and thinking skills of S4 students through infusing high-order thinking strategies as well as incorporating a variety of assessment modes to enhance the feedback process.

3. **Fostering values education and Life Planning Education to provide students with all-rounded learning experiences**

   i. **Values education as the key to students' whole-person development**

      To enable students to achieve balanced development and personal well-being, the school curriculum needs to embrace universal core values such as responsibility, respect, empathy, perseverance, and commitment to conservation of nature. Opportunities can be created for students to discuss life events, gain values-related experiential learning opportunities and reflect on the target values for their whole-person development. Values education also lays a good foundation for students to make ethical judgements and sound decisions in their future lives. As shown in Case 3.7, P3 students learnt to be thrifty and smart consumers by making wise choices of food and buying items under a budget constraint at a supermarket so as to live a more healthy lifestyle. Case 3.8 illustrates how a "forest school" helped students build strong connections with the natural world, develop an appreciation of nature and become committed to protecting the natural environment.

   ii. **Focusing on self-development and maximising students' potential**

      One of the aims of creating all-rounded learning experiences for students is to maximise their potential so that they can achieve a more fulfilling life in future. It is therefore necessary for schools to be wholly committed to tailoring students' individual pathways and enabling them to set clear life goals through Life Planning Education (LPE). LPE components incorporated into daily learning and teaching include supporting students in gaining a better understanding of their needs, interests and abilities, developing their academic and career-related aspirations, and developing such positive values as punctuality, integrity, diligence and perseverance which are highly valued in the workplace. These LPE components can facilitate students to pursue their pathways, achieve individual excellence and become future-ready. In Case 3.9,

LPE was extended from classroom learning to an authentic workplace when S4 students worked as interns in the "Secondary School Students Attachment Programme" to gain authentic workplace experiences. These interns nurtured a growth mindset and underwent a self-discovery journey to set higher life goals, and have become more ready to meet the challenges ahead.

4. **Guiding students to develop self-directed learning strategies that support them to learn how to learn**

Self-directed learning capabilities enable students to learn how to learn through setting goals, formulating plans, selecting learning strategies and materials and reviewing the learning process and progress. English teachers have infused self-directed learning strategies into the school English Language curricula through different entry points so as to develop students into lifelong learners. In Case 3.10, P3 students acquired self-directed learning capabilities through a life-wide learning activity designed to provide them with an opportunity to apply their learning in daily-life situations, thus building up their confidence in both English learning and tackling problems in an everyday setting. Through engaging in active exploration of text grammar, P4-5 students in Case 3.11 adopted an inductive approach to learning and continuously reflected on and applied the knowledge and skills learnt so as to develop reading to learn capabilities and become more effective learners. Teachers in Case 3.12 explicitly incorporated self-directed learning and vocabulary learning strategies in order to boost students' confidence in and ability to comprehend unfamiliar texts. In light of this, students' reading to learn capabilities were enhanced. Case 3.13 reveals how teachers guided S4 students to become their own assessors to monitor and evaluate their own performance in the course of incorporating elements of an elective module into the Compulsory Part of the school's English Language curriculum, thereby gradually releasing the learning responsibility to students themselves.

Conclusion

Many of our collaborating schools have updated and optimised their school curricula through different entry points for students to tackle the challenges ahead, with many positive results yielded in different aspects. These successes are the outcomes of holistic curriculum planning, effective inter-departmental collaboration and strong curriculum leadership.