

STORYBOOK METHOD OFFERS HAPPY ENDING



Dr Lau Siu-ling, a Kowloon school principal, believes a storybook-based curriculum has unlimited potential. Photo: Edmond So

This belief is shared by Dr Lau Siu-ling, head principal of Po Leung Kuk (PLK) Choi Kai Yau School, in Kowloon, and her teaching staff.

Lau was working at another PLK school before being invited to help set up the new school, which opened in 2004. Her past experience has convinced her of the benefits of a curriculum based on storybooks, which offer unlimited potential.

“Think of all the things students can learn from different kinds of stories and the various characters found in them,” Lau says. “A story has a plot – from beginning to end – a climax and resolution: it invites students to think as they read and learn how to write creatively. It’s a resource without limitations.”

She adds: “It’s very important students develop a reading habit from when they’re young. It will benefit them throughout their lives.”

At the school, the “storybook curriculum” is used in both English and Chinese subjects in its primary and secondary (IB curriculum) sections.

Wong Chi-fung, development curriculum head of the school’s Chinese department, also believes storybooks can help to broaden the minds of students. “Now, we’re using a translated novel called *The Breadwinner*, by Deborah Ellis, for our Grade Seven students,” she says.

“The story focuses on the life of a teenage Afghanistan girl living under the war-torn Taliban regime.

“It’s an excellent book that allows students to go beyond their world and think about the circumstances faced by others. Stories like this can open their horizons and lead to interesting discussions and perspectives from students.”

She likes the fact students learn about great literary skills directly by reading books by writers of good literature.

“These authors write using such detailed and articulate expressions,” Wong says. “With our curriculum, students are habitually exposed to great writing, which helps enhance their own skills, too. They are not afraid of creative writing as they’ve read so many books at school.”

Yet the school’s curriculum is beneficial not only to students, but also to teachers, Wong says.

“The teachers have grown much closer because we need to plan lessons, constantly share ideas and recommend new books. It’s very important to choose the right kind and level of books for students.

“We also spend time reviewing and discussing how our lessons go,

and helping each other solve any problems that arise. In the process, as teachers we’ve developed a tighter bond. It feels very satisfying learning together in this way as colleagues; it’s a happy experience.”

However, adopting a new curriculum can be demanding for some teachers – especially those that are not used to teaching without textbooks; to make it work, staff development is important.