

Managing change in the kindergarten – A Project of Setting Up Various Play Corners

Jennifer Ching Wun Cheung

香港教育大學幼兒教育學系客席講師

香港浸會大學持續進修學院基礎及幼兒教育部兼任講師

曉明樂教育中心校監

明我幼稚園音樂課程顧問兼導師



▲ 香港教育大學幼兒教育學系客席
講師張靜媛

It was my pleasure and honour to have the chance to lead the programme regarding the upgrading and modification of play corners for both the Island Campus and the Olympic Campus of the Kindergarten. I would like to thank here for the efforts made by the management teams and teachers at

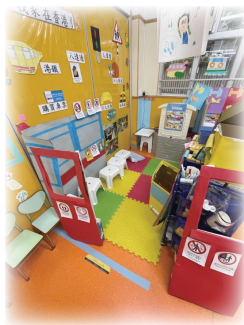
both Campuses. Their dedication and support throughout the process were at all times invaluable.

According to EDB Guideline 2017, “play” certainly demonstrated an indispensable role in kindergarten curriculum. The role of “play corner” inside kindergartens becomes more and essential. Young kids can learn relatively spontaneously inside the

play corners, which allows them more freedom to choose, to think and to decide on their own.

There were two parts in the scheme. The first part was the engrossment and optimization of the five play corners, namely:

1. The Role Play Corner;
2. The Science Corner;
3. The Creative Corner;
4. The Language Corner; and
5. The Mathematics Corner.



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The second part was the implementation of “corner teaching”. Kids will be divided into different small groups and have different activities at the same time. Teachers could have more interaction with the kids during group activities. Meanwhile the kids could have more time to stay inside the corners to have the experience of “play” instead of being “lectured” in a big class. This change of teaching approach is difficult for schools, teachers and students at the immediate start of such change. Yet with time and practice, the change brought the schools more effective and efficient teaching in the long run.

To carry out the programme and to manage the change, the school management team must consider a lot of factors. We have adopted the “SMART” approach for the target setting:

1. Specific: Enforcement of “corner teaching”
2. Measurable: Reaction from the kids (both appearance of happiness and actual academic and other results because of the enforcement) and continuous assessments through observation
3. Achievable: Plausible by the setup of various corners with reasonable costs
4. Realistic: Within reach, the programme was realistic and relevant to improving the learning environment of kids at school
5. Timely: Clearly defined timeline for the teachers and management staff, with specified commencement date and a milestone target date of implementation. The availability of a specified reviewing period makes the entire programme smooth for running.

Reference was made to Leithwood et al. (1994), which had stated “seven strong claims about successful school leadership”. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. Throughout the whole process, there are several key features about managing change to be highlighted which makes the success of the project.



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1.Positive Atmosphere for Change

Normally teachers will feel challenging when there is a change in the teaching approach from wholly theme-based to “corner learning” approach. Management team can address such resistance and facilitate the smooth change in progress precisely. For instance, it is normal to have teachers’ concern about the increase in time they should spend on preparing the corners. In our experience, the school had changed the theme duration from 2-3 weeks to 4 weeks, allowing teachers to have deeper investigation on each single topic. Further, teachers might also question about the efficiency of “corner teaching”. In our experience, the management team carried out pilot scheme and assigned two classrooms of different approaches to show the advantages of the “corner teaching” settings to all parties. In the classroom of “corner teaching”, teachers could focus on small group interaction and kids could have more social interactions with each other in various corners. Comparison of efficiency was rightfully recognizable.



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2.The Launch of a clear year plan with objectives

Every school will have their own organizational culture. The means to address resistance and facilitating implementation is important. Schools should give a clear timeline about the entire project as well as the expectations at each specific timeline. The steps should be clear and open to all teachers. In our experience, we started from the briefing of the project with training of play corners and sensory bins provided. Teachers were encouraged to insert their innovative ideas in their classrooms. The next stage was the communication on the corner design, with monitoring, review, evaluation and feedback from all parties. To minimize setbacks, the setup of pilot classes gave teachers more confidence by experiencing the success of the “change”. The final stage was the implementation of the “corner teaching” approach with physical set up of various play corners inside the classrooms.



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We had been reviewing the result from time to time, by different assessment methods like observation of the kids’ behaviour throughout. We made recordings about their favourite corners, time spent on each corner and the frequency of each visit, etc. We concluded that kids do love sensory bins and we suggested teachers to include this element in their classrooms accordingly.

3. Innovation planning and preparation

Reference was made to Garcia et al. (2014) which claimed that “Innovation is a dynamic, new or original idea, process or practice that is intentionally designed to solve problems, meet needs and improve lives and which involves often complex social and interpersonal change.” We have realized that teachers always follow the assigned lesson plans and adopted the direct teaching methods. They have found the “corner teaching” approach difficult. In our experience we have launched the scheme of teachers’ training by “part & whole”. The introduction of STEM concept and key factors for a successful “science corner” certainly performed as a remarkable start of the training programme.

In conclusion, it was such an invaluable experience for the school management board, the teaching staff and certainly me to have the chance to carry out the project. It is absolutely challenging to manage a “change” in schools. The efforts and mutual support from all parties did count the success and are always irreplaceable.

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