

群策群力 進一步優化小班教學

前言

隨著 2009/10 學年起，政府於公營小學的小一班級開始，分階段實施小班教學，多年來圍繞著小班教學的爭論已逐漸減少，加上 70% 的小學會加入小班教學，社會對小班學校被標籤化的憂慮也漸漸消退。這一年來，政府和教育界已聚焦探討如何優化小班教學的實踐，加強教師培訓，以充份發揮小班教學的優勢，讓學生得益。我們希望「小班教學研究報告」（下稱「研究報告」）的發表將有助進一步推動小班教學的實施。

香港教育學院小班教學發展與研究中心（下稱「小班中心」）於 2006 年成立，過去四年多我們在支援學校、促進教師的專業發展、開展小班教學研究、加強與內地、澳門和外地就小班教學的合作與交流等各方面開展了不少工作，累積了一定的經驗。本中心意見書分為兩部份，第一部份是回應研究報告的設計及分析（詳見附件），因研究報告是以英文發表，附件亦採用英文本。在下文我們則對本港各界可怎樣群策群力，進一步優化小班教學的實踐提出一些建議。

從多層面推動小班教學

我們認為要進一步推動小班教學，充份體現小班教學的成效，在以下四個層面還需進一步努力ⁱ：

1. 學校系統層面

整體來說，本港在學校層面系統的協作仍在起步階段。在這個層面，可建立跨區及跨校式的「學校網絡」或「學習社群」，以促進學校間的專業交流和分享，讓各成員學校開闊眼界、互相觀摩，這比學校单打獨鬥的成效更大。例如，小班中心於 2004 年建立的「優化小班協作計劃」、小班教學研究後期設立的學習圈和教育局近月委托大專院校舉辦的「促進實踐社群」課程，便取得一定成效。

2. 學校層面

在學校層面，校長領導至為重要。「研究報告」也指出推行小班教學最有成績的學校，都有一個共通點，就是校長對小班教學的信念強，能親自關注課程設計和教師發展。要成功實施小班教學，學校可採取下列措施：

- 樹立共同願景，建立學生為中心的教育理念。

- 結合學校的各項關注事項（例如融合教育、語文學習、評估等），靈活調運用資源，制定校本小班教學政策。
- 由於各校背景不同，學校要理解本校學生特點，思考小班教學可怎樣更好照顧學生的需要。
- 學校領導要分析教師的能力和興趣，為教師創造空間，制定教師專業發展策略。
- 在校內建立學習社群，通過共同備課、同儕觀課評課等，促進教師的校本專業交流。
- 優化課堂學習環境，改善班級經營。

上學年「小班中心」和夥伴學校協作，通過校本分析，協助他們制定校本小班教學政策，並結合其他學校關注事項（例如融合教育、語文學習等），靈活運用資源，成效甚佳。

3. 課堂層面

課堂層面的變化是優化小班教學的根本，要假以時日，通過教師專業發展和課堂實踐，逐步累積經驗。這牽涉到教師要確立教學目標，並善用小班環境，調適課程、選取適切的教學策略，採用多元化評估策略，加強對個別差異的照顧等。「研究報告」在這方面有很多好的建議，也注意到部份教師透過前期支援後，已能自主地在小班課堂設計及改善教學。我們在學校支援時，也觀察到這可喜的變化。

4. 家長層面

小班教學要成功實施，家長的支持至為重要。由於部份家長求學時，習慣了大班規範性的學習方法，加上受考試文化影響，只重視功課多寡、統一測試分數高低，這都和小班教學精神不脛合。對學校做成壓力。政府和學校都應進一步讓家長了解小班教學的理念，爭取他們的支持和配合。

結語

過去一年各界就小班教學的互動開始進入了良性狀態，這局面得來不易。不過，由於前期缺乏準備，整體來說，全港 300 所小班教學的學校不少仍在起步階段。若政府和教育界以為政策爭議已過，過早習以為常，甚至只把小班教學視作是眾多教育項目之

一，而忽視小班教學是對本港教育的長遠投資，是提升教學成效、促進教師專業發展的良機，學校便失去了優化小班教學的動力，錯失改革的契機。我們相信小班教學的成功推行，可為本港的教育改革帶來嶄新的動力，希望各方都能珍惜，持續努力，讓本港的基礎教育素質更上一層樓。

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¹取材自黎國燦博士，《小班教學仍在起步 切忌習以為常》，2010 年 2 月 5 日發表於明報

Comments on the “Study on Small Class Teaching in Primary Schools in Hong Kong: Final Report”

Scope of the Study

1. It is important to understand the restricted scope of the Study from the outset, which was a study of effects of SCT in three school subjects, Chinese, English and Mathematics, at Primary 1-3 levels (for the 2004-07 cohort) and at Primary 1-2 levels (for the 2005-07 cohort) respectively. Hence, it only partly answers the research question “what are the benefits of SCT in the local context?” (Report, p. i).

Research Design

2. Since all the Primary 1 classes in the 37 “experimental schools” had adopted SCT at one go in the 2004/05 school year, it did not allow the researcher to adopt an experimental or even a quasi-experimental design (p. 52). In other words, the researcher could not directly compare the class size effects between students from the same year cohort in the same school, who would have been assigned to control and experimental groups. Hence, the researcher had adopted a “compromise” and fairly complex design by i) using other normal classes in the same school as “controls”; ii) adding 15 “reference schools” with normal classes as a second “control” group; and iii) identifying “a matched sample” of 37 schools, with reference to the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) scores, to compare with the “experimental schools” taking part in the SCT study.
3. It is possible that this design feature relying on comparison of different cohorts of students across years, albeit they were at the same level (e.g. Primary 1), may have contributed to the generally inconclusive results. For instance, the 2004/05 P.1 cohort in small classes was apparently compared with the 2006/07 P.1 cohort in “normal classes” of both the “experimental” and the “reference schools” and so on. Such comparisons across year could be problematic because in addition to academic results, many factors (e.g. historical events) could have affected students’ learning and their attitudes. For instance, Hong Kong was in the recovery in 2004 from the SARS epidemic which broke out in 2003. There was no equivalent event in 2006.

4. Even if the students were from the same school, the history effect could have affected the interpretation of results. History as a threat to internal validity is defined as “extraneous variables external to the subjects that are present during the course of the study and distort the results” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 405). Students in one historical year are subjected to different impacts from societal events and so could not be directly compared with students in another historical year even though they came from the same schools, let alone coming from different schools.
5. There selection of “a matched sample” of 37 schools using 2004 TSA results may have also contributed to the general inconclusive results. The question is: are schools really matched if they have similar scores in the TSA? The schools may be matched in the test scores but there are other elements (e.g. school culture; gender balance in the school; the socio-economic status of the families; teacher-student relations, etc.) which may have an impact on students’ motivation and attitudes.
6. It was reported that observation took place approximately in 100 classes annually during Chinese, Mathematics and English lessons. The data on classroom observations in small classes are very valuable and illustrate the need for improvement in teaching for learning. Nevertheless, the sample did not allow a systematic comparison of teacher practice in different subjects between large and small classes, or comparison of changes in teacher practice before and after teaching small classes. As the Report mentions, some schools had changed the team of teachers teaching the small classes.
7. A further design problem is that the Study conflates class size reduction and in-service work on SCT and so it is difficult to know which is important. As we understand, the teachers of the “experimental schools” had initially very different levels of participation in in-service work on SCT organized by the then EMB. For example, while the same teachers from a few schools had regularly participated in a series of workshops, many teachers from other schools had participated in these courses in a rather ad hoc fashion without much continuity in learning. The formation of learning circles took place at the final years of the Study and, as mentioned in the Report, had led to more positive effects. If there had been a more systematic organization of in-service training from the beginning of the Study, the effects of SCT in the “experimental schools” might have been noticeably increased.

8. The Report did not provided much details about the tools of measurement, e.g. the design of the attainment tests. Are the academic outcomes measured on vertical scales? Has the attainment tests taken into consideration the differences in the curricula of the 37 “experimental” schools?

Findings and Recommendations

9. The parts concerning classroom observation are very interesting. The in-depth qualitative analysis on teachers is exemplary. The Appendix (III) entitled Learning for Teaching highlights the important learning theories and should be read by all educational practitioners and teacher trainers.
10. From the outset, the research adopted the premise that teachers could build on their previous work on effective teaching, and identified six principles of effective teaching as the research framework. These six principles have now been adopted by the EDB as the prescriptive requirement for all in-service training providers on SCT. Nevertheless, while the six principles are indeed important elements in effective teaching, they are not based on empirical studies of teaching in small classes, and there is still much to be learned about effective teaching and pedagogies in small classes in Hong Kong and elsewhere. We believe that the Report has opened up much broader dimensions for consideration in designing professional development courses and activities, and its full value will not be realized by merely resorting to the six principles identified at the beginning of the Study.
11. While the principles of effective teaching may largely apply to large and small classes, we believe that much more work needs to be done to study the effect of class size on classroom dynamics and classroom process (e.g. teaching and pupil behaviour) and what particular pedagogies and organization of classroom environments may work better in the local context. Studies on teacher development and change in the process of implementing SCT are also important, as the pathways for teacher development vary among teachers. In addition, SCT in Hong Kong will also benefit from comparative studies of SCT in other places. All these will provide fresh impetus to bringing out new findings and ideas from the academic and educational community, which will further improve the implementation of SCT in Hong Kong in the years to come.
12. The Report repeatedly reports schools conforming to the requirements of TSA at the Primary 3 level. As SCT progresses up to the upper primary levels, the influence of the relatively large number of standardized tests from P.3 onwards

on teaching and learning in small classes is a genuine issue of concern. We believe that this is indeed a challenge to the successful implementation of SCT in Hong Kong primary schools and indeed the success education reform at the primary level, and merits urgent study by the Government and schools.

Centre for Development and Research in Small Class Teaching

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