

## "Read" for the skies! MOE's Community Libraries in Schools Program Cultivates a Habit of Reading

(Photo/Text: Chen Pei-ling, Junior High School Division)



Literacy lies at the heart of learning. As such, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has constantly been channeling resources to efforts that boost reading and literacy levels of the population. To create reader-friendly spaces, MOE has disbursed funds to elementary and junior high schools to set up Community Libraries in Schools from 2017 to 2020. Within the span of four years, a total of 619 schools across 22 counties and cities received the funding. In 2019, the Most Beautiful Community Library Competition was held, and 18 schools received recognition for having created beautiful reading spaces. It is hoped that, through the precedence set by these stellar examples, "reading" and "aesthetics" can be brought together even more closely in days to come.

The K-12 Education Administration (K12EA) shared that Community Libraries in Schools are more than conducive spaces for reading; these multi-purpose libraries can also be used creatively to cater to different pedagogical needs. In this way, schools can truly become centers of learning in the community. For example, the Community Library in Kaohsiung Yangming

Junior High School is named "Xiaoshuzhai" (literally, "studio of book-learning") after Zhuxi's *Sishi Dushu Ge* (Reading in the Four Seasons) and Su Dongpo's *Heziyou Lunshu* (On Calligraphy). The library hopes that the messages behind these works will resonate with readers as they embark on their reading journey at the library. In addition, the library also plays host to reading clubs run by volunteer mothers, musical concerts, and book scavenger hunts. One can also find a wide array of ICT tools such as computers, tablets, interactive boards, and interactive experiential learning areas in the library that enables diverse learning approaches and the creative use of space within the venue.

Meanwhile, Liren Elementary School in Taichung City designed its community library around the visual elements of *The Little Prince*. Visitors to the library are greeted by a Tree of Dreams, complete with changing lights, standing at the arc passageway. The library also engages foreign teachers to hold English storytelling events, organizes family bonding activities in the Starlight Picture Book Zone, which is also designated as a Hidden Alcove of new books. The interior design, taken as a whole, reminds one of the cosmos, which is why the school gave the name "Story Planet" to the Community Library. The school has also organized a range of activities such as book clubs, storytelling activities, talks and sharing sessions, family bonding activities, themed book fairs, book scavenger hunts, and the Library-Navigator Training Program, etc., to help the community see that reading can go beyond books and schools.

Miaoli Junior High School, located in Miaoli County, adopted butterflies as the motif of their library and named it "Pavilion of Dancing Butterflies". To cater to different needs, the library is divided into various sections, such as the multi-purpose reading area, new book display area, a lounge area, a discussion zone, and a recreational reading area. The school has also made full use of the library for events and activities such as soap-making workshops, artwork launches and exhibitions by painters who work with their mouth and foot, newspaper reading activities, themed book fairs, talks by foreign lecturers, volunteer training, etc. The school hopes that these activities can help readers find joy among an ocean of books, much like how butterflies dance joyously among a sea of flowers.

Meanwhile, Huaren Elementary School in Hualien County named their library "Castle of Books". The "castle" is adorned with walls of vibrant colors, which make visitors feel like they are on a quest for knowledge deep in the heart of a forest. In order to attract members of the public to bring a book home, the school has organized "Reading with Joy" sessions to spread the word about resource sharing in the community library. In addition, the school holds regular meetings for mothers who have volunteered their time to be storytellers and take part in reading promotion activities, as well as organize service-learning projects in collaboration with professors from National Dong Hwa University. With these initiatives, the school hopes that the culture of reading will take root in the community and that the rural-urban divide can be bridged.

Reading no longer has to be in just black and white; the world of reading is now decked in splendid colors. K12EA expressed its hope that the establishment of Community Libraries in Schools can create a culture of reading, which makes learning more fun and engaging. Furthermore, with adequate communication and dialogue, libraries can create conducive spaces for reading which, when compared against traditional libraries, are more cozy and relaxing. Ideally, with the increasing prevalence of Community Libraries in Schools, more people can begin to appreciate the joy of reading, pick up a habit of reading, and, ultimately, sustain a lifelong love for learning.