

Visit to the University of Cambridge Primary School: Our School

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The University of Cambridge Primary School (UCPS) was established in September 2015 as the first primary university training school in the United Kingdom. It aims to create an 'irresistible' learning community for researchers, teachers and pupils. Their vision is built on the principles of 'Ambition, Innovation and Inclusion' and five values, namely, 'Empathy, Respect, Trust, Courage and Gratitude'.

The undergraduate education students of Kobe University and I visited the UCPS and observed the conduct of certain lessons in mid-March, 2017.

1) A Unique and Well-designed Building: Facilitates Learning for Pupils, Teachers and Researchers

The UCPS building's unique circular design was derived from not only traditional structures, such as the Pantheon in Rome, the Tietgen Student Housing in Copenhagen, and the Yanomami Communal House in the Amazon, but also from contemporary ones, such as Heinavaara Elementary School in Finland, Fuji School in Japan and certain other schools in the UK.

The UCPS building has doorless classrooms and shared Learning Street. There is a courtyard that acts as a unifying platform in the centre. In addition, the school has a large open space for a playground with wild wood and orchard. Every space in the campus is designed for the pupils to learn by making use of all their senses.

Pupils can freely leave and return to their classrooms. They can go to the other classrooms or clusters or even outside of the building to interact with other people. In this way, the building fosters democracy.

Learning Street is important not only for the pupils but also for the teachers and researchers. We could observe freely and naturally without disturbing the flow of learning. The building has an ethic of 'openness'.

In the multipurpose hall, a six-meter-high beautiful window displays an image of the Milky Way that was recently taken by the Cambridge University's Institute of Astronomy. According to Mr James Biddulph, the UCPS's head teacher, when the pupils feel sad about their failure, the teachers would encourage them to look at the image and try making them realise that our mistakes are not bigger than the universe.

2) An Assessment That Feels Welcoming

We observed the pupils' phonics assessment. A few pupils went to the teacher and read aloud the word or non-word showed to them. After other pupils had finished, one pupil simply sat down in front of the teacher without reading. In response, the teacher placed a bee stuffed toy near her ear, nodded a few times and talked with the pupil. She passed the stuffed toy to the pupil, who, upon holding the toy, read the non-word. The teacher's approach was welcoming. Although the teacher's educational objective with regard to phonics is clear, it does not entail a strict assessment. In the UCPS, teachers make assessments utilising various ideas.

3) 'We are all under the same sky'

A few pupils in the UCPS attend school only for a short period, as their families move from one place to another because of their parents' job or research. Thus, it is important that the children develop a positive view of the world. To address this concern, a world map is placed at the entrance gate so that everyone can see it every day. On the UCPS website, there are also many pictures of the blue sky taken all over the world. These pictures are Ruth Proctor's artworks. She said this artwork was based on 'the idea that we are all under the same sky, no matter where we are on earth' (UCPS website).

This school also places importance on its global impact. Biddulph (2016, p. 102) stated, 'We did not perceive education in terms of global capitalisation. Rather, we saw "our educational responsibility as a responsibility for humanity of human beings"' (Biddulph 2016, p.102). The last part is cited from Beista's writing (see Beista 2006, p. 106). The school's staff members often refer to the school as 'our school', indicating their strong attachment to the school's vision and mission.

References:

Beista, G. (2006) *Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Biddulph, J. (2016) *Releasing the imagination: Celebrating the art of the possible. A university challenge: Cambridge's primary school for the nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marks Barfield Architects (2016) *University of Cambridge Primary School*, pamphlet.

Marks Barfield Architects webpage (accessed 19th May 2017) University of Cambridge Primary School. <http://www.marksbarfield.com/#!/projects/cambridge-primary-school/?filter=date&layout=default&gallery=concept&image=1>



Fig.1 Mr Luke Rolls (centre), the undergraduate students of Kobe University, and Ayako Kawaji (third from left) pose in front of the main entrance of the school.

Fig.2 A pupil answers a question using a bee stuffed toy during a phonics assessment.



Fig.3 The school employs 'Philosophy for Children (P4C): Think Together Wherever They Like'



Fig.4 The school has a large open space for playground with wild wood.