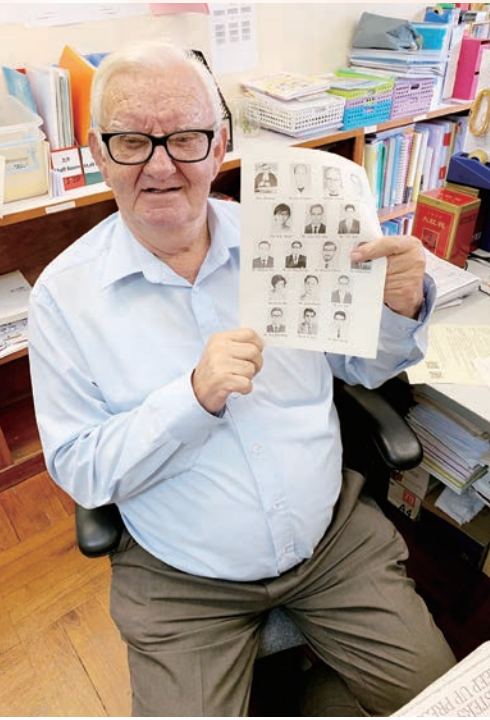


Forever a Happy Kidult

An Interview with Mr. O'Brien



Mr. O'Brien is definitely a familiar name for most old boys who studied in CSK before 2000s. Whether you were into sports, you would surely be impressed by the loud voice, sense of humor and charisma of this "naughty" PE teacher who joined CSK since its establishment in 1969. With Mr. O'Brien being one of the guests in the 50th anniversary fundraising dinner event held in CSK campus, we have taken the opportunity to have an in-depth talk with him to learn more about his good old CSK days as well as his latest update.

Despite the fact that Mr. O'Brien has left CSK for years, the only difference is probably the disappearance of his trademark beard on his face. Other than that, he was no different from the old time when he was in CSK - he remains very energetic, articulate and humorous. "I am actually just above 21 years old," Mr. O'Brien grinned, with his usual sense of humor. While it was

surely a joke, we could sense that Mr. O'Brien's passion in teaching was not any lower than any young teachers. Currently, while he is still based in Hong Kong, he has been invited to be spending around 3 days a week to teach English in an international boarding school in Shenzhen. While the teaching schedule is overall intensive, he appears to enjoy a lot as his current job allows him to leverage on his vast teaching experience in Hong Kong to help the students out while he can also build close bonding with the relatively small group of students.

Indeed just like many long-serving CSK teachers, Mr. O'Brien still has very strong memory about his experience in CSK. "I still kept the cartoon drawing by a F5D student in 1991 - I took away from him when I spotted him drawing in class. He must be angry with me," Mr. O'Brien jokingly said. "I planned to return it back if I saw that boy again!"

Being known as the icon of physical education in CSK, Mr. O'Brien joined CSK because of sports too. He recalled. "At that time, I was teaching in another school and led their school football team. It was how I knew the La Salle Brothers during some footballing events." By then La Salle Brothers, who were also Irish, asked Mr. O'Brien out for lunch and invited him to work in CSK, where he kick-started his glamorous teaching journey all the way from 1969 to 1998. Afterwards, he travelled back and forth between Hong Kong and Ireland to take care of his sick mother with spells in two other schools in Hong Kong before he reached his official retirement age in Hong Kong.

Teaching in CSK for close to thirty years, there were two events that Mr. O'Brien found especially memorable. "Right after I had joined CSK, I was

given just 3 weeks to organize our first swimming gala!" He revealed that as he was so new to the CSK where no one had organized any similar events before, he was so nervous at that time. Luckily, it all went smoothly eventually. Another memorable event was that he volunteered having his beard shaved in front of the school for the sake of fundraising activities in March 1980. "Brother Eugene who was the principal at that time intended to cut my beard with a pair of golden scissors that were used in the school opening ceremony," Mr. O'Brien laughed out loud. "But the scissors did not work quite well as they were blunt already!" Eventually two students were given this 'honorable' task to shave his beard.

As one of the most popular teachers in CSK of all time, Mr. O'Brien did not really think too much about that as it was not his intention to be one. However, he did admit that he has always been create a relaxing and fun environment to help students build confidence instead of holding them back, especially when it comes to learning English. "I want to make sure the students understand that it is ok to make mistakes without any fear. After all, grammar is not the most important. It is more important to understand and to be understood."

He raised another real-life teaching example. He once had a class in which students did not really have much response. Hence Mr. O'Brien decided to ask the whole class to stand up and let them sit down only after they had tried to answer a question, regardless of whether they got the answer right. Gradually the students became responsive to avoid standing up for the whole class. Once it became the norm, he went one step further to ask why the students picked a particular answer. "Once the atmosphere was built up,

teaching was made easier," he said.

All in all, Mr. O'Brien thinks there is always only one student who can be the top of the class. If one does not come first, it does not mean that he fails. He made an analogy that an artist will not be worried about getting low marks in history or a sportsman will not care about getting low marks in physics as long as his physical condition is good enough. "When something does not quite work out, it does not mean it is a failure. It just means that you get to try again or you get to try something else," Mr. O'Brien suggested.

Interesting facts about Mr. O'Brien

- Before his teaching career in Hong Kong, Mr. O'Brien actually worked for the government as a radio engineer. He was sent to Hong Kong for a 3-year project to provide maintenance service for the radio equipment in the Peak. It was how he felt in love with Hong Kong and decided to come back again. At that time, the demand for teachers, especially native English speaking ones, was huge and it was how he ended up being a teacher! Yet despite being an engineer, Mr. O'Brien

claimed, probably in a humble way, that he was not good at mathematics or Science at all and hence he never taught those subjects.

- As a PE teacher, Mr. O'Brien has been leading CSK football teams for years. When he was young, he used to follow the Liverpool football club, though he commented that Premier League these days were no longer interesting as it was not British football anymore due to the influx of foreign players. Nowadays he still follows the Ireland national football team while he is more into rugby game.
- After joining CSK, he mainly taught English, PE, RS(Religious Studies) and he had also taught EPA (Economics and Public Affairs).
- Interestingly, Mr. O'Brien recalled that when the school first started, due to the lack of resources in the first few years, he was once asked to teach Chinese History for one year - literally with a Chinese history textbook written in English!

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