

## Incorporating social and global issues into the Primary school English Language writing curriculum for better transition to secondary

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Globalisation, advancement of information technology and development of knowledge-based economies in a climate of global economic restructuring have brought about unprecedented worldwide changes. To enable our younger generations to rise to the challenges, Hong Kong has implemented the New Academic Structure (NAS) since September 2009 to promote whole-person development and life-long learning so that students with different abilities, interests and attitudes can develop their talents to the full.

International Education Forum and Expo, EDB (2011)

Teaching students about global issues and encouraging them to see the world through different lens has been an indispensable element in the English curriculum with the implementation of the New Senior Secondary curriculum. Students need to read a wide range of informational texts on global issues and themes. This was especially revealing when the performance of students in Territory-wide System Assessment at Primary Six showed that they were lacking exposure to reading a wider range of informational texts about global issues and themes such as natural disasters, charities, environmental protection and cultural differences. The importance of encouraging students to look beyond Hong Kong and to understand the diversity of language and cultures in different parts of the world and the richness of culture across our planet has been recognized by teachers.

Before the collaboration between the school and our team, the principal and the teachers have reflected that under the through-train mode, the diversity of Secondary One students' learning ability has kept widening. Although this has been expected, they still want to strengthen the whole school's understanding of and support for its students, and alleviate students' adaptation problems upon their promotion to the secondary school especially in the area of English Language. Bridging the gap between P. 6 and Secondary One writing performance of students was therefore the focus these years. Teachers reported that although all students reached the TSA basic competencies, they were not performing well enough in Pre-Secondary 1 assessment. A problem was thus identified between primary and secondary bridging in English Language.



From analyzing the performance of students, we also understood that the primary six students were eager to write and were able to produce written tasks of over 100 words in length easily, but they had problems using a wider range of vocabulary and sentence patterns when they came across topics they were unfamiliar with. Nonetheless, we believe that students have potentials to become proficient writers given that they had a strong foundation established a year ago with the school-based curriculum. Students' ability to think critically could well be developed through a range of global issues incorporated into the writing curriculum. With a good head start at Key Stage One writing curriculum in the first year 2011-2012, the school focused on developing the Key Stage Two writing curriculum in the second year 2012-2013. To improve the quality of students' writing in particular at Key Stage Two, both the support officer and the English teachers acted as a team and worked together on different topics to enhance the quality of English language writing through a process of holistic curriculum planning, inquiries, implementation of different writing strategies, and on-going reflection and evaluation.

### **The Core Writing Curriculum**

Building on their established practice in developing writing packages at Key Stage One, teachers developed consensus for the key elements in the writing packages at Key Stage Two. The writing packages were designed to enable the students to benefit from a wide range of social, cultural and global perspectives they would not be exposed to otherwise.

The linkage between reading and writing was carefully thought through and established in the writing packages. **These packages were characterised by strong input on a clear reading and writing framework, vocabulary, carefully selected and structured language patterns, substantial reading materials and graphic organizers for topic writing to enrich students' ideas.** For instance, since **persuasive texts** posed particular challenges to students because of the unfamiliar ideas and concepts that they might present, students should be taught to recognise the **persuasive features and techniques. The persuasive writing framework, audience and purpose, persuasive phrases and adjectives** need to be taught to students. This was important for developing writing technique after reading. Teachers had a chance to explore the techniques and procedures in teaching persuasive text structure in one of the writing packages we co-developed - ***Save the Environment***. Below is a snippet of example:



Class: P.6. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing task:**  
You are asked to write a piece of persuasive essay to tell why people have to protect the environment.

**What is Persuasive Writing?**  
It tries to make people feel the same way you do about the topic.

**Persuasive Writing**  
A type of writing that tries to convince a reader of an opinion or belief.

**How is a persuasive writing piece set up differently than other types of writing?**

*I like apples and my friend too!*

## Writing A Persuasive Text

- Title**
- Opening statement**  
State your position/opinion
- At least 3 arguments**
  - State the argument
  - Provide supporting evidence
- Concluding Statement**  
Re-state your position/ opinion

### GLOSSARY

global warming	increase in the temperature of the earth, which may change weather patterns and affect plants, wildlife and people
greenhouse gases	gases that cause global warming
glacier	a large mass of ice that moves slowly
endangered species	animals or plants that may soon not exist because there are very few now alive
extinction	a situation in which something no longer exists

Vocabulary input about environmental protection

The aim to widen students' exposure to global issues led us to co-develop one of the reading and writing tasks – **Charity** in the second term last year. Here is the mind map we used to stimulate students' thinking on the writing topic, 'How are you going to spend HK\$10,000?' (which was similar to a P. 6 TSA writing topic in 2012):

**Construct a mind map**

**Brainstorm ideas**

Help the others

How are you going to spend HK\$ 10,000?

Save it up

Spend on yourself

Help the others

buy some articles for them for daily use

donate money to Red Cross

donate money to church

buy clothes for my family

buy food and drinks

transportation fee

buy books

read in my spare time

buy a mobile phone

buy clothes

donate money to the church

buy a long stick

workshop

**Help the others**

1. Why do we help (those in need / the needy)?

Find one **QUOTE** from the Bible that best describes this photo.



(a) It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Providing good writing modeling strategies was also an idea brought to the teachers. Students needed to learn what constituted a good piece of writing and learn how to accomplish it. It was evident that teachers demonstrated competence in infusing shared writing, interactive writing, independent writing and guided writing at different stages into their writing curriculum. They were sensitive to students' learning needs and made appropriate adjustment to the learning materials and teaching pedagogy in the teaching process.



## The Writing Process

As Carl (2006) defined an effective writing assignment should engage students in a series of cognitive processes such as reflection, analysis and synthesis so that students are able to transform the reading material in order to complete the writing assignments. In the writing lessons, students were guided through the process of drafting, revising and editing and sharing their ideas and feelings on the topics. The lessons encouraged reflection, analysis and synthesis of what they had learned from the reading elements in the packages. Students worked in groups to prepare the draft. Intensive discussions were involved. They **allowed students to share more ideas together**. Hudelson (1989) stated that all the language processes are interrelated and students become more able language users when they are asked to use both oral and written language in varied ways and for varied purposes. The changing practice of writing was supported by teachers. They agreed that the carefully planned procedure including providing substantial input, the step by step writing procedures and feedback at the mind-mapping and drafting stages were helpful and useful. In fact, teachers spent more lesson time on teaching writing during class time but they thought it was worthwhile experience. The **language errors were reduced** since students would look again and again into their own writing through the stages. Most students **made good progress in terms of ideas and content, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and even voice**. Teachers even brought these ideas to other levels as shared in their end-of-year panel meeting.

Teachers **spent more time at the pre-writing stage on scaffolding students with lists of words, phrases and sentence starters and sentence patterns**. It is important that writing skills, such as **elaboration skills of growing or expanding a sentence by adding adjectives, adverbs and the Wh- elements (time, place etc.) in a sentence**; understanding of the basic structures e.g. subject-verb-object; **giving reasons** using 'because'; **using dialogues** with interjections in story writing and expressing feelings whenever appropriate, had to be taught explicitly. Less able students could write more than what the writing frames provided with the pre-writing input. With criterion-referenced rubrics being continued from Key Stage One to Two, students knew more thoroughly what they needed to write in the task and they could write well. They paid more attention to the writing skills necessary: vocabulary, language forms and functions. For some able students, their work showed more creativity. **They became more confident in writing to express themselves and their writing was richer in content progressively**. It was good that students completed their writing in the school so that not only could teachers give timely feedback to them, their true writing ability was also manifested in the writing lessons for teachers' follow up action. Indeed, teachers' timely feedback, encouragement and positive reinforcement helped students write better. Students' learning attitude was very positive and the able **students demonstrated great ability and enthusiasm in their work. They were able to give mature and meaningful ideas in writing about social and global issues and felt more confident to write persuasive and expository text types**.



In this sharing session, teachers from St Mary's Canossian Primary School will help teacher participants to gain an understanding of how students develop their writing skills; identify effective strategies to promote writing; explore techniques and materials to stimulate students' thinking on social, global and cultural issues; and learn that becoming a competent writer involves knowing and understanding the forms, functions and features of writing. A number of other school cases of how teachers attempt to improve students' writing will also be shared with teacher participants. Teachers' efforts and dedication are definitely crucial factors for success in this attempt as they need to spend considerable time giving constructive feedback to students. It is hoped that through the sharing teacher participants could equip themselves with some strategies and adapt them to meet the learning needs of their students.

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### References

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