

# **A Splendid Spin: Revamping and Enriching the Current Book-based and Text-based Curriculum to Fit in the Framework of the English Language Curriculum for Effective Learning**

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The ultimate aim of the English Language curriculum is to help learners form “a good foundation in learning English, paving the way for independent and lifelong learning and effective communication of knowledge, ideas, values, attitudes and experience” (Curriculum Development Council, 2004, p.4). Schools endeavour to develop their school-based English Language curriculum towards this direction and HKMLC Wong Chan Sook Ying Memorial School is one of them. After much discussion, the School’s English team opted for a curriculum, which was organized around story books in KS1 and authentic texts in KS2 because they believed that reading, as a receptive skill, was essential in providing inputs to facilitate learning. The notion that the more students read, the better their English would be motivated teachers to march forward. However good will does not always promise positive outcomes. Several years of trial did not bring about the expected enhanced interest in reading or boost student performance in assessments. Our collaboration started when we wished on one hand to identify the problems and on the other to revise and enrich the existing curriculum to facilitate effective learning.

## **Stock-taking is a prerequisite for our leap forward**

The benefits of reading to language learning are unquestionable. Elley (2000), one of the pioneers who supported the Book Flood Strategy, said that his research evidence showed that ‘it is possible to double the rate of reading acquisition of Third World primary school pupils with a “Book Flood” of about 100 high-interest books, per class, and short teacher training sessions’. The Strategy benefited not only first language learners of English but also children of diverse cultures and mother tongues. He said the benefits of reading brought about enthusiasm among second language learners of English and this boosted their capability in all four language skills. His findings and the successful experiences of the Book Flood Strategy in New Zealand and Singapore had great impact on the education scene in Hong Kong. The Integrated English Language Programme (IELP) and ‘Learning to Learn’ English Language Programme (LLELP) initiated by Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services (CECES), which served the students of KS1 and KS2 respectively, began to take shape under such an environment. Both programmes aimed at supporting English

language learning through “effective teaching methods in pleasurable and enjoyable environments” (CECES, 2006). Influenced by the Book Flood Strategy, the two Programmes made providing a variety of authentic reading materials related to students’ daily life experiences one of their key features. Teachers of HKMLC Wong Chan Sook Ying Memorial School, who were very keen on boosting students’ motivation to learn, were attracted to the principles and hence joined the Programmes.

The Programmes were designed to build an English curriculum using a number of authentic materials, which included mainly story books in KS1 and a variety of narrative and information texts. It aimed to expose students to natural English and student-centred tasks were designed to enhance students’ motivation to learn. A lot of reading methods like Guided Reading, Sustained Silent Reading, Retelling and KWL were suggested for classroom delivery. These key elements and concepts match well with the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT), upheld in the central curriculum. TBLT advocates the use of English for meaningful purposes and in appropriate contexts, i.e. functional use of language. This echoes well with the authentic teaching content rooted from daily life as suggested in the IELP and LLELP Programmes. TBLT stresses on stimulating a natural desire in learners to improve language competence. This could also be translated to designing student-centred, contextualized and diversified language activities. In other words, both the central curriculum and the two programmes were designed basing on similar principles.

Task-based Language Teaching

IELP and LLELP Programmes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to allow learners to <b>experiment</b> with and <b>explore</b> English through learning activities</li> <li>• To engage learners in the <b>authentic, practical</b> and <b>functional use of language</b> for <b>meaningful purposes</b></li> <li>• Learners are encouraged to activate and <b>use</b> whatever language they already have</li> <li>• The tasks provide a <b>purposeful context</b> for teaching and learning of <b>grammar</b></li> <li>• Role of TBLT is to stimulate a <b>natural desire in learners to improve language competence</b> by completing meaningful tasks</li> </ul>	<p><b>Method:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided reading</li> <li>-Sustained silent reading</li> <li>-KWL</li> <li>-Retelling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teaching strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- well-researched</li> <li>- Innovative</li> <li>- Integrated four language skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Teaching content and resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Authentic</li> <li>- Related to daily life</li> <li>- Cross-disciplinary</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student-centred</li> <li>- Contextualized</li> <li>- Diversified</li> </ul> <p><b>Assessment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formative (On-going)</li> <li>- Summative</li> <li>- Peer &amp; self assessment</li> </ul>
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## Revamp and enrich the existing Programmes to better cater for the needs of our learners

### Shaping a school-based English curriculum

The original design of the IELP and LLELP Programmes was to allow schools to select from a list of curriculum materials and sequence them to suit the needs and interests of their students. Teachers found from their past experience that there were still room for improvement in their decision on both their choices of materials and the sequences of these selected texts and books. This provided a good opportunity for our review and revision of our curriculum. Thus, our first work focus was on re-grouping the materials and having them sequenced to suit the needs and interests of both teachers and students. The principles of task scaffolding and task dependency were taken into consideration. Story books of similar themes or containing similar grammar items were grouped together into modules. For instance, the story books in the second term of P.1 (see below) were mainly about description of people. Students began to pick up the language and the text coherence to describe a person and an object. Then the story books in the second term were re-ordered to enable students to further develop the descriptive language. They got more ideas and vocabulary about activities in *The Monkey Bridge*, numbers in *Five Green Monsters*, clothing items in *It's Pink, I Think* and the way people spoke in *Mrs Wishy-Washy* and *The Hungry Giant*. The knowledge was then transferred to enrich students' writing.

### P.1 curriculum (Term 2)

Story	Module	Themes	Story Books	
1	Connecting with the natural world	Animals	The Monkey Bridge	+ activities
2	Places and activities	In the park	Five Green Monsters	+ numbers
3	My five senses	Using my eyes	It's Pink, I Think	+ clothing items
4	My five senses	Using my senses	What's in My Pocket	+ verbs of five senses
5	Connecting with the natural world	Transportation	To Town	+ means of transport
6	Places and activities	In the shop	The Dancing Fly	+ prepositions
7	Connecting with the natural world	Farm animals	Mrs Wishy-Washy	+ dialogues
8	Connecting with the natural world	Food	The Hungry Giant	+ story elements

The same concept of module planning was brought in when we re-arranged the sequence of the teaching materials in KS2. We first decided on the final writing task and then worked backward to fit in other tasks in the module. The following tables show the grouping of the teaching materials into modules. Take the P.5 curriculum as an example. The first module in the first term comprised three texts, which was mainly about introducing a person. Tasks were developed to equip students with the skills and knowledge to interview and write about their principal. An interview was integrated prior to the actual writing to inject authenticity to the task and arouse students' interest in writing.

**Primary 5 Term 1**  
Content

Module	Theme	Text
My Neighbourhood	School	Introducing Our New Teachers
My Neighbourhood	School	To All My Young Friends
HK & it's neighbourhood	Hong Kong or Geography	Ms Pig's First Adventure
The World Around Us	Things in the Nature	Why Cats Wash After Dinner
The World Around Us	Things in the Nature	The Monster of Loch Ness Dinosaurs
Food & Drinks	Eating Habbits	Keep Clean, Be healthy
My Neighbourhood	People's Jobs	A Brave Doctor
The World Around Us	Entertainment & Leisure	Making a Kite

**Primary 5 Term 2**  
Content

Module	Theme	Text
Food & Drinks	Exploring Food and Drinks	Mouthwatering Email
Change	Making Changes	Watching TV Is Good For You Watching TV Is Bad For You
Change	Changes in Hong Kong	Are Mobile Phones Good for Us?
The World Around Us	Nature	Rainbow Zapped
The World Around Us	Natural Elements	My First Typhone in Hong Kong
HK & it's neighbourhood	Hong Kong or Geography	Let's Watch a Movie
My Neighbourhood	Home & School	A Night Visitor
The World Around Us	Entertainment & Leisure	A Sticky Problem

As in the second term, we grouped the three texts *Watching TV Is Good for You*, *Watching TV Is Bad for You* and *Are Mobile Phones Good for US* in the same module. After much discussion, we decided first on the final writing task and it was to be an argumentative writing. It was a challenge to both teachers and students. Teachers reflected that they only taught the reading texts and gave students a general understanding of what these texts were about because they had no confidence in their students' ability to understand and then write an argumentative text. Nevertheless, the much improved student performance in writing in the first term when task-based language teaching was realized in planning and organizing the modules encouraged teachers to accept the challenge in the second term. We began by analyzing the texts in our collaborative lesson preparation meetings and generated the success criteria for an argumentative writing. The introduction-arguments-conclusion structure was the frame we would introduce to students. The forming of an argument was crucial in

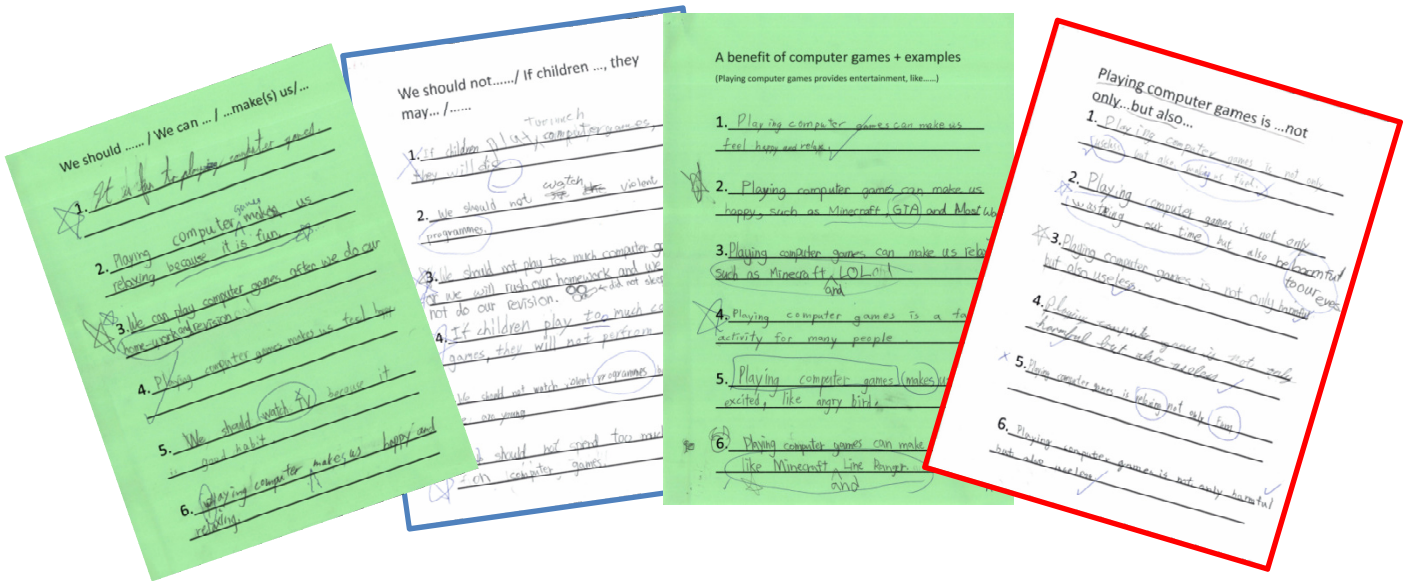
conveying the key messages. Therefore, the first work focus was on helping students to discover the structure of an argument. The reading text *Watching TV Is Good for Us* was adapted so that the structure of an argument became more explicit to students. As shown below, after some initial warm-up discussion about TV so as to activate students' prior knowledge of the topic, students worked in groups to decide on the main idea of each paragraph. The group work was discussed in class and students were alerted to the structure of an argument – topic sentence → example(s) → benefits/supporting details/elaboration. Students then applied this structure and filled in the details on the table. In this way, students found the structure easy to follow and gained a lot of confidence in dealing with such difficult texts. Another hurdle in forming an argument was that students lacked the language and vocabulary to express their ideas. Hence, some key phrases were picked from the text and discussed in class. In return, students made sentences using these phrases. The strategy of poster circulation was brought in to create an atmosphere of competition, which students loved very much. Each group was given a worksheet with a key phrase written on it and students had to make several sentences with the key phrase. Then the groups would circulate the worksheet and they needed to check if these sentences were sensible and accurate.

### Revised learning and teaching strategies

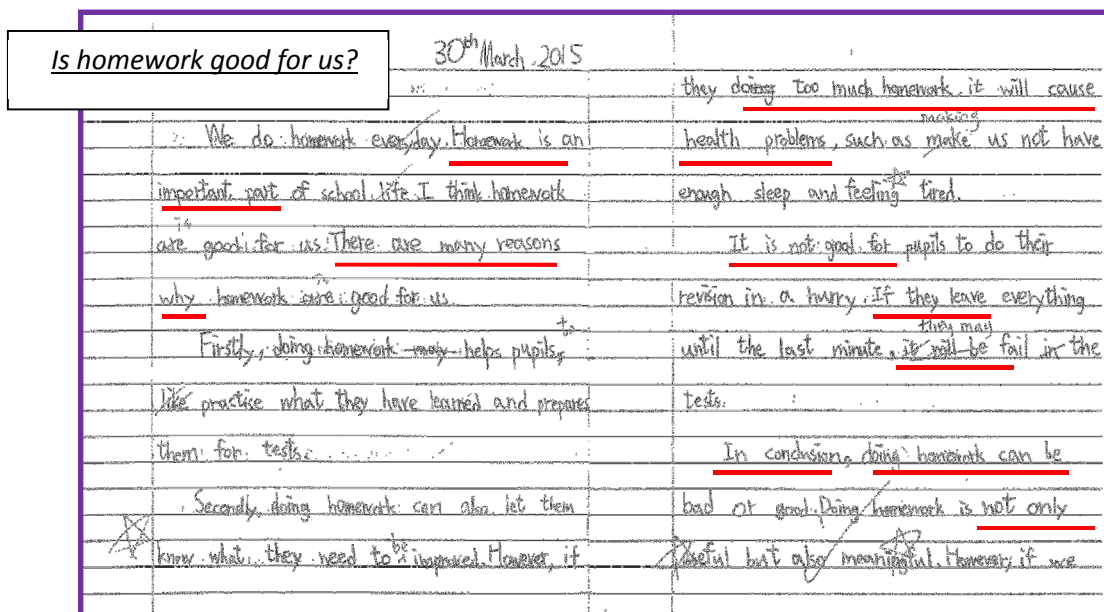
To maximize the benefits of reading, the learning and teaching strategies were designed so that the story books and authentic texts could be re-visited as many times as possible, each of which served a different learning focus. For instance, students were led in the first place to predict and enjoy reading about how *Cookie the Cat* messed around at home. It 'fell in the toilet' on Monday and 'knocked a plant off the windowsill' on Tuesday. The Primary Two kids all burst into laughter. Then the story was read the second time to focus students on the days of a week. Alongside enjoying reading of Cookie's butter-finger deeds, students were asked to match the days of a week with the things Cookie did in the week. The story was read over for the third time. Here, students were asked to look at the sincere smile on Cookie's face at the first page and they were led to guess that Cookie had, in fact, some good intentions – helping at home. The lesson was then turned to inferring with students what housework Cookie wanted to do in the toilet, to the plants and in the kitchen. The task was further extended to cover all kinds of housework students did at home. Students found the learning of vocabulary much more meaningful and fun. They were provided with opportunities to learn and apply reading skills such as prediction skill, word attack skill and inference skill.

Besides Shared Reading and KWL, other useful strategies were integrated to make learning more effective. For instance, teachers found the introduction of good sentences very essential to help students formulate ideas into sentences. Therefore, many good sentences were introduced in the authentic texts and then a fun

competition on sentence making was conducted. The co-operative learning strategy and poster circulation were brought in to allow sharing of ideas and peer-editing of sentences. As shown below, the Primary Five students learnt two good sentences from the text and they imitated the structure to form their own sentences. Each group made one sentence at a time and the worksheet was circulated to another group, who would contribute their sentence there while the first group would get another worksheet to have their sentences written. Students liked the activity very much while teachers found that students were much more focused and engaged and hence better knowledge retention was resulted.



Hard work bore fruit. Our work on re-structuring the reading inputs did help students pick the ideas and language. The careful scaffolding of tasks enabled students to enhance their writing performance. For instance, Primary Five students were enabled to formulate arguments after several learning tasks analysing the structure of an argument.



The student was able to follow the basic structure of an argument, which included a topic sentence and supporting details, to form his own. He could also use the good sentences learnt in the text like ‘*there are many reasons why...*’ and ‘*too much ... can cause ...*’ to express his ideas.

### **The wisdom we gained**

What we cherish most in such a book-based / text-based curriculum is the impact of interesting learning materials on student learning. We would like to share with the audience the process in which we select, adapt and use of these materials to motivate students to read and write. Careful planning is the key to success. Hence, module plans and teaching materials will be shared to show how the tasks are designed and scaffold. Last but not least, a part of our sharing will be devoted to suggesting how these interesting learning materials could be placed in the context where textbooks are used.

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