



From cross-curricular planning to tailoring for learner diversity

Background

With the changing needs of students and the complexity and diversity of curriculum planning, teachers see the need to adopt cross-curricular planning in the school. Using English as an entry point, English teachers can collaborate with other subject teachers in curriculum design. Students can then gain more exposure to English, even in subjects taught in Chinese. This leads to a smoother interface with the New Senior Secondary (NSS) as the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 - 6) (2007) states:

‘Consistent with the primary and junior secondary English Language curricula, the senior secondary English language curriculum recognises the importance of fostering a greater coherence between English Language and the other subjects through cross-curricular collaboration. Such a vision is rooted in the belief that learners should explore knowledge and gain experience in a comprehensive and integrative manner. When they are able to make connections among ideas and concepts, their motivation will be raised and their learning strengthened. Likewise, the knowledge they acquire, and the skills and positive attitudes they develop in each key learning area (KLA), will be enhanced.’ (p.4)

Since there are five classes in S1, and not all classes can be taught using the same material, it is hoped that cross-curricular planning can be used as a means to tackle learner diversity.

Level

S1

Strategies used

Vale and Feunteun (1995) maintain that ‘English is not an isolated educational issue. The child has whole needs in terms of learning. It is important to acquire language across curriculum. [...] When developing their understanding of language, children need a lot of opportunity for review, recycling and consolidation of language, ideally through a variety of cross-curricular contexts (p.66).’ Since different students have different learning needs, standards and expectations, teachers need to develop materials that are tailored to students’ levels and pace of learning. In this project, teachers designed and used teaching materials wisely, taught different skills, assigned different tasks and used students’ feedback to inform teaching and learning.

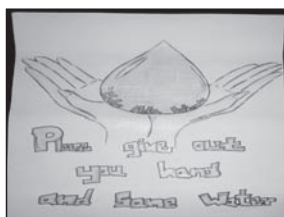
It was done successfully because teachers relied little on the textbooks and therefore had a lot of room to prepare things that suit students’ needs. Students generally found the topic familiar as the Science teachers had already boosted their interest in the theme in the Integrated Science (IS) lessons.

What happened

Teachers chose the theme of ‘Water’ to work on collaboratively. Co-planning meetings were held regularly by the English and Science teachers to design the learning materials. Most of the tasks were designed to meet different learning needs. Some examples are given below.



Task	Learning objectives	Differentiation
1. Poster design and commenting on posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop language proficiency through exposing students to some art forms – posters • Enhance positive learning attitude (cooperation and appreciation) through group work 	<p>Using teaching materials wisely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker students comment on some posters with teachers giving guidelines regarding the colour, words and pictures seen. • More able students form groups and design their own posters. Students are required to add a slogan on the posters.



Posters designed by students

2. Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop speaking skills like reading aloud, persuasion, question-asking, responding and bargaining 	<p>Teaching different skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker students record their speech in the MMLC in groups. The tapes can be used by teachers for evaluation, giving feedback and as future teaching materials. • More able students 'sell' the posters they have designed. Students from other groups act as buyers and write cheques to buy the posters.
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Students presenting and selling posters

A student accountant is writing a cheque to buy a poster

3. Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce written texts relevant to context and appropriate to purpose and audience 	<p>Assigning different tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker students write a speech and present it in class or in assembly to reinforce speaking skills. • More able students write an email to the principal.
4. Journal writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide room for students to reflect on their own learning process and give valuable feedback to teachers 	<p>Using students' feedback to inform teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This task provides an opportunity for students to inform teachers about what they have learned and how they feel about the module. • Such feedback is useful information for teachers to adjust their future teaching.

Roles of teachers

Teachers	Roles and achievements
<p>English teachers</p>  <p>Students working together in groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare teaching and learning materials • Generate a vocabulary list with the help of the Science teachers • Facilitate group work in the poster design and poster-commenting process • Assess students' presentation, their English usage in particular, in the Science project (Water Filtering) • Help students evaluate the learning process (Journal writing)
<p>Native-speaking English Teachers (NETs)</p>  <p>WWD - Prize-giving ceremony</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate with students the World Water Day (WWD) (22nd March) in the school's English Garden (poster selection, TV-viewing on proper water use, quiz, etc.) • Engage students in activities beyond the classroom and outside lesson hours • Provide insights and share ideas with teachers regarding cross-curricular planning
<p>Science teachers</p>  <p>Science project presentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with English teachers by giving advice on Science-related content matters • Reinforce students' vocabulary-building by introducing some Science terms in English in IS lessons and teach students to use them in the Science project presentation • To be the 'buyers' of posters and assessors of students' selling skills and Science-related matters in particular in the English presentation

Impacts

Both English and Science teachers found the experience of planning the curriculum across subjects useful. Teachers could work collaboratively in lesson-planning, co-teaching and designing the module. It largely enforces teachers' professional development in integrating language across curriculum.

Teachers agreed that cross-curricular planning can grant students a chance to have a different approach of learning. Moving away from the textbook, teachers observed that students had participated very actively in group tasks like poster design and poster-selling, and the activities held on the World Water Day were really fun. They took it very seriously and reflected the learning process very positively in their journal. There was also obvious improvement in students' speaking skills besides consolidation of the Science-related content knowledge.

Facilitating factors

1. Close inter-departmental collaboration

Since the beginning of the school term, regular meetings have been held between the Science and English teachers. The presence of both the Science and English panel heads and coordinators has been encouraging and motivating to all the teachers involved in the meetings.



2. Cross-curricular classroom observation for professional development

In this project, Science and English teachers went into each other's classrooms. They acted as facilitators, observers, co-teachers and assessors of students' work. "Observation of students' work habits, their involvement in instructional activities, their patterns of errors, their strategies for communicating with limited linguistic knowledge, and the questions they ask about the content could provide insight into problems with instructional plans." (Genesee & Upshur, 1996, p.82)

3. Making good use of authentic resources

In order to map the English curriculum with Science, English teachers need to design some authentic teaching and learning resources to boost students' interest. In this case, the theme is 'Water'. Reading passages were taken from newspapers and the Internet, e.g. the website of the Environmental Protection Department and Water Supplies Department. To enhance students' vocabulary-building and artistic sense, puzzles and poems were designed. On World Water Day, the NET even brought some special vegetarian food like pizzas and snacks to the Garden. Students not only had an opportunity to taste the food, but also learned how vegetarian food consumes less water during production and this can help save water and protect the environment – exposing students to the subject outside the classroom. The flexibility created by moving away from the textbook makes the time involved really worthwhile.


Difficulties and suggestions

Students were highly involved as the curriculum was quite interactive. They found the topic relevant to their life and they could use their knowledge to develop their ideas. After this module, the students became more proficient in speaking. They feel much more confident about presenting in front of the others. *The curriculum includes a lot of new vocabulary and tasks. Some less able students have encountered challenges* and **I have to make some adjustments in the curriculum.**

Ms. Man Yuen Mei (S1 English teacher)

I think the students were interested in the project. They tried their very best to participate in different kinds of classroom activities such as brainstorming in groups, designing posters and presenting their end products. Most of the students were able to make use of what they learned in the IS lessons. *Their biggest challenge was how to put the ideas into English. Although the less able students found the whole project quite hard in the beginning, they were able to manage it and to express themselves using the target vocabulary.* I think the project is worthwhile as it gives the students a new learning approach.

Ms. Yung Ka Wan (S1 English teacher)



Students enjoy drawing and presenting the posters. The incorporation of IS subject knowledge (e.g. water saving and cleaning) in their poster design was successful. They were particularly interested in selling the posters. Most of them reflected that they had learned useful strategies for selling and bargaining in their journals. Students also found the realia like cheque books motivating. Peer assessment was incorporated in various stages of this section and it was found useful.


The link between IS and English subjects could be stronger. For example, the English teachers can pre-teach the necessary vocabulary items like *sponges* for making a filter. Its aim is to make students feel confident when presenting their projects. Joint assessment could be arranged so as to foster the link between the two subjects. For instance, a laboratory report about making a filter can be assessed by both IS and English teachers. While IS teacher focuses on the content of the students' work, English teacher can assess students' writing skills.

Ms. Xu Ling Ling (S1 English teacher)

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Language arts for all: enabling diverse learners to learn through poems and songs

Background

Like other secondary school English teachers in the territory, the English teachers in this school are faced with the curriculum challenge of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum. To cope with the challenge, teachers have taken the initiative to infuse language arts texts, like poems and songs, into the S1 curriculum to prepare their first cohort of students for the NSS. In undertaking this new language initiative, learner diversity is a concern to teachers, taking into consideration the fact that most of their students are not proficient English learners who mainly come from families with a low socio-economic background and the common conception that language arts is a privileged learning experience for the able learners. According to teachers' observation, the level of motivation to learn English varies greatly among individuals in this S1 cohort and students' language abilities vary considerably among the five S1 streamed classes. Faced with the learner diversity within class and between classes, teachers found it a challenge to teach language arts effectively.

Level

S1


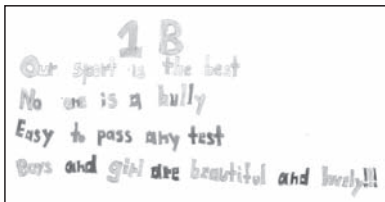

Strategies used

With the aim of giving students exposure to poetry and developing the experience strand, an extended unit on poems and song was integrated into the textbook unit. To enable students of varied levels of motivation and readiness to understand, appreciate and respond to the language arts materials used, a number of motivational and learner diversity strategies were tried out in this unit.

Coping strategies	Rationale for using the strategies
Vary the nature of learning tasks and activities to match and stretch students' abilities and interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rich learning experiences that nurture each students' combination of intelligences enable students to perceive themselves as potentially smart in different ways (Gardner, 1993, as cited in Tomlinson, 1999).
Vary the amount and style of support and guidance to suit students' readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Giving sufficient preparation and assistance can increase students' expectancy of success, which in turn, generates initial motivation to learn (Dornyei, 2001).Students learn best when they are suitably challenged (Jenson 1998, as cited in Tomlinson, 1999).
Vary the style of instruction to foster active learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Active learning enables learners to retain, understand and use more knowledge and skills (Tomlinson, 1999).
Vary the demands of the expected output to promote learner autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Promoting learner autonomy can maintain learning motivation (Dornyei, 2001).

What happened

The extended unit was developed around the topic, 'Bullying' which was conceptually linked to the theme 'School Life' in the coursebook. It was mainly composed of an acrostic -- 'Bullies', a narrative poem -- 'The Bully Asleep' and a song -- 'Don't Laugh at Me'. Below are some of the classroom practices that interweave the aims of poetry teaching and the strategies to cater for learner diversity in this unit:

Strategies and aims	Classroom practices	Effectiveness
<p>Vary the amount and style of support and guidance to enable students to understand the meaning of the poems</p>	<p>Connect the unfamiliar to the familiar to give learners sufficient preparation and assistance in the construction of learning</p> <p>To support understanding of the narrative poem -- a less familiar text type to learners,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show pictures of the bullies and victims in 'Doraemon' -- a familiar cartoon to students to present the situation and the theme in the poem at the pre-reading stage. • Provide students with a paraphrase of the verse written in prose -- a more familiar text type to learners to assist reading at the while-reading stage. <p>Adopt graded instructional materials to give diverse learners different entry points to construct meaning by connecting the old to the new</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare graded texts for classes of different language abilities to understand the narrative poem instead of using one standard paraphrase for all students. 	<p>Task: Put yourself in the role of 'Jane' in the narrative poem and imagine what to say to the boys plotting against the sleeping bully</p>  <p>A short speech from an average class showing the student's understanding of the story line and the theme of the poem -- taking revenge on the sleeping bully.</p>
<p>Vary the style of instruction to enable students to understand and appreciate the structure and language of poetry</p>	<p>Increase mental involvement in the learning situations to foster active learning</p> <p>Compare poems with the prose translations to let students actively evaluate the relative aesthetic value of the two texts in order to provoke analysis and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the structure of the original verses such as stanzas, form of the poems, word order, etc.; • the poetic effect achieved by language such as rhymes. 	<p>Task: Write an acrostic using the class name</p> <p style="text-align: center;">'One B'</p>  <p>A class writing done by a weaker class demonstrating their knowledge of acrostics and rhymes.</p>
<p>Vary the nature of learning tasks and activities to motivate students to respond to the imaginative texts through oral, written and performative means</p>	<p>Use a broader range of tasks and activities to provide rich learning experiences</p> <p>Design various learning tasks and activities that cater for students' different multiple-intelligences (MI) to nurture students' experience strand:</p>	 <p>Students in a stronger class involving in a hands-on sequencing activity.</p>

	MI catered	Example tasks / Activities
	Bodily /Kinesthetic and Logical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence the jumbled lines of the acrostic • Match the stanzas of the narrative poem with sections of the paraphrase
	Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch PowerPoint slides, animation and role-plays to explore the themes and the issues in the poems and song • Draw pictures to explain the speaker's feelings in the song
	Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write simple poems to express real or imaginative ideas • Give oral and written descriptions of opinions and feelings • Do choral reading
	Inter-personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do class discussions and activities like Think-pair-share to exchange opinions and ideas with one another
	Musical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and sing the song



Students in an average class showing eagerness to write rhyming words in creating a rhyming couplet for the narrative poem.

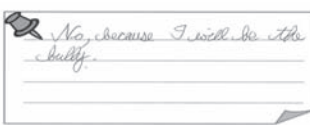
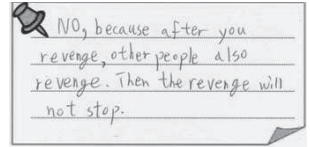


Students' drawings could well illustrate the feelings of the victims as described in the song about bullying.

Vary the amount and style of support and guidance to enable students to respond to the imaginative texts

Use audio-visual cues to give stimulus
 Show various audio-visual aids -- picture slides, animations and sound effects at the post-reading stage to help students identify with the characters, events and issues in the target poems and song before getting them to respond in class.

Task: Share opinions on the theme of the narrative poem -- 'Is taking revenge on bullies good?'



Students' thoughtful responses made after watching an animation about retaliation.

Provide linguistic cues to offer assistance

- Give students some options to consider while getting students to develop their personal responses towards the imaginative texts. For instance, show in class the different adjectives that students might want to use when asking students to describe the bullies in the acrostic poem.
- Present starters and skeletons for students to follow while they are generating their opinions and feelings towards the characters, events and issues in the poems and song.

Do you think Jane is 'foolish'?

YES

NO

Yes, I also _____
(Do you think Jane is foolish?)

She _____
(Why do you think Jane is foolish?)

No, I don't think Jane is foolish.
(Do you think Jane is foolish?)

I think she is kind
(What do you think about Jane? Use at least 1 adjective)

She knows his mother doesn't
care him and she feels he is
poor, so she doesn't take
revenge on him.
(Why do you think so?)

Written response from a student in an average class

A framework guiding students to make evaluative responses: taking clear stance and then explaining the views with supporting reasons

Task: Make evaluative comments about the character, 'Jane' in the narrative poem

No, I don't think Jane is foolish. I think she is smart and forgiving. She doesn't bully Bill and comforts him because she knows if she hurts him, she will be a bully.



A well-organised oral response from a student in a stronger class under the guidance of the skeleton provided.

Consider the calling order

To give students of different language abilities varying amounts of support and to increase student participation within the class,

- First invite the stronger students to express their personal responses without providing any linguistic cues.
- Then show the linguistic cues in class and call on the weaker students to respond with the help of the cues.

From an observation in S1D, the class discussion was no longer dominated by the capable students and more students from the average and weak ability groups shared their oral responses with improved confidence.

Vary the demands of the expected output to motivate and enable students to create simple poems

Allow choices in the learning product to promote learner autonomy

- Assign an acrostic writing task for the class to practise and apply their knowledge of acrostics but let individual students decide whether to use their own names or their classmates' as the topic and whether to use rhymes or not in the poem.
- Ask students to extend the previously taught narrative poem to practise and apply their knowledge of rhymes but only set a minimum task requirement (writing a rhyming couplet) allowing the more able students more room to write more.

Task: Write a rhyming couplet to extend the narrative poem

Bill Craddock he woke up suddenly.

Heard Jane say sweetly,

Hello Bill, don't bully.

You look very friendly.

Please be friendly.

Talk to your friend politely.

Student from a weaker class motivated to perform beyond the basic requirement.

Impacts

1. Increasing understanding and appreciation

Teachers found most students could **understand and appreciate** the imaginative texts used. They felt the **comparison of verse with prose** could **improve** students' **understanding of the poems** and **heighten** students' **awareness of the poetic features**. Students shared similar views too. 90% of the students reflected in the questionnaire that they could better learn the features of poems by **actively** comparing verse with prose because prose is a **more familiar text type** to them. In fact, 82% of the students thought the unit has **increased their knowledge and appreciation of poetry**.

2. Developing readiness to respond

Teachers generally felt most students were able to **generate and express their opinions and feelings more readily**. Actually, both teachers and students believed the audio-visual and linguistic cues were useful in developing responses. One of the student representatives said in an interview, 'With the picture and sound images, we can **generate opinions and feelings more easily** by projecting ourselves into the imaginary roles and situations in the texts; with the starters and skeleton, we can **better organise and express our thoughts**.' Teachers also shared that the provision of **options** could **stimulate** students to **develop other possible responses** and the key is to **deliberately acknowledge students' originality** in front of the whole class so as to convey the message that the choices offered are neither closed options nor model answers. Teachers from the **weaker classes** added that the options given could **provide** their students with the **necessary vocabulary** to develop their responses. In addition, students liked the choices they were given in creating the assigned poems since **the autonomy** they had enabled them to **express their responses at their own pace**.

What do you think about the bullies?

A. selfish B. naughty
C. proud D. cruel / unkind
E. rude F. ?

Some suggested adjectives for students to consider when describing the bullies in the acrostic poem.

*I don't like bullies.
I think bullies are cruel
and selfish.
They want to make fun
of people.*

A description made by a student from a weaker class using the suggested adjectives in the given options.

*I don't like the bullies.
I think bullies are violent.
They laugh at and shout at people*

A description made by a student from an average class using her own adjective with the stimulus of the given options.

Effectiveness of the provision of options

3. Enhancing enjoyment

All teachers observed that students **showed interest** in the tasks and activities in the unit which was regarded as a **good start** for their students to **experience language arts**. This observation coincides with the findings in the questionnaire. A great majority of the students expressed that the **wide variety of task or activity types** could **motivate** them to read and respond to the assigned texts. More encouragingly, about 80% of the students said the learning experience of poems and song in this unit **adds enjoyment to English learning and develops their interest in poetry**.

Facilitating factors

1. Flexibility in managing change

The S1 teachers at this school are **receptive** to new ideas and are **flexible** in managing change. To cope with the challenges of the NSS, they tried out the Language Support Officer's advice on adopting a more **holistic approach to curriculum planning** using language arts as an entry point and **made flexible arrangements** to accommodate the new language initiative. On the one hand, they trimmed some textbook units to **create space** for infusing language arts into the curriculum, while on the other hand, they **integrated poems and songs with other areas of language learning** like vocabulary development and grammar teaching to enable students to learn English through poetry. The teaching and learning of poetry was also **integrated with assessment**: a poem appeared on the examination paper for the first time to get students to practise and apply the previously learned knowledge of the text type. Most importantly, teachers **aligned the implementation of the new language initiative** with one of the primary concerns in the **school plan** -- catering for learner diversity. With the building of this **consensus**, teachers made an attempt to adopt different instructional strategies to guide their students of diverse abilities and motivation level to experience poems and song in the unit.

2. Strategic deployment of resources

Teachers tied in the poetry lessons with the oral lessons, during which the **Native-speaking English Teacher (NET)** practised choral reading with the class using the poem taught to develop students' speaking confidence. With a flexible use of the **school timetable**, this choral reading activity was then **incorporated into a form-based activity** where every class had an opportunity to share their reading on stage in a relaxing atmosphere. It is only with the **collaborative effort** of the local teachers and the NET that such an enhancement and enrichment activity could be created to maximise the learning of the more able and the less able students.

Way forward

The school is at an emergent stage in integrating language arts into the formal curriculum, so empowering teachers to teach language arts texts is set as a priority area. With students' diverse needs taken into consideration, equipping teachers with the skills to cater for learner diversity in using language arts becomes a key concern. Therefore, curriculum decisions were made early this school year that the language arts materials would be infused into learning units only. But as teachers become more confident in using language arts activities, **module development** is more likely to occur to help learners make better connections in what they learn.

In the coming school year, while efforts will be made to **sustain the good teaching practices** being tried out in the poems and song unit on 'Bullying', further attempts will be made to **explore other motivational and learner diversity strategies** to enable the diverse learners at the junior levels to understand, appreciate and respond to other language arts genres.

References

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Dyslexia and English Language teaching: a case of identifying needs and planning for support for secondary one students

Background

Catering for students with special learning needs is an issue of concern for inclusive education in Hong Kong. This article describes an attempt by English teachers at a Tai Po secondary school to support dyslexic students in learning English in S1. The school adopted a whole school approach which included both in-class and withdrawal support. The teachers' competency gradually developed from understanding the nature of dyslexia, to attempting to identify particular problems and devising support measures through holistic curriculum planning and deployment of resources.

Level

S1

Strategies used

Dyslexic learners may show weakness in areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, attention, poor reading and spelling skills, memory and interpreting and remembering messages, sequencing and organising information, auditory and/or visual perception, and motor skills (Levine, 1984; Peer, 2000). Turner and Pughe (2003) further note that for dyslexic students, the difficulty is a cognitive one, affecting those language skills associated with the written form. The weaknesses will affect their learning across the school curriculum.

In terms of teaching, multi-sensory techniques emphasise direct teaching of all new materials, and maintaining teacher-student interaction. Krzyżak (2006) describes involving the use of more of the child's senses, especially the use of touch and movement (kinetic learning) in this approach.

Whereas a multi-sensory approach was an instructional strategy usually adopted in the withdrawal mode in the 1970s and early 1980s, a whole school approach may include both in-class mode and withdrawal mode and caters for students with features of dyslexia through coordination of various stakeholders. Using a whole school approach, teachers can devise some strategies to help dyslexic learners through holistic planning and effective deployment of resources. The school case in this article is an example of using such an approach.

What happened

Recent school policy

To sustain a recent effort to care for the needs of dyslexic students, the school tried to strengthen a special education curriculum in English. Two teachers were nominated to work with the Language Learning Support Section (LLSS) of EMB on a project aimed at devising support measures for dyslexic students in their English language curriculum. The collaborative project aimed at improving teachers' competency in dyslexia diagnosis and remediation; and supporting students' learning. To achieve the two goals, the following work was undertaken this year.

1. Understanding of dyslexia

The teachers' understanding of the nature of dyslexia, managing classroom behaviour and teaching techniques increased through sharing of the literature in regular project meetings.

2. Identification of needs of focus students

The teachers could not simply rely on the initial information provided to them on S1 students with dyslexic features. An understanding of the students' specific difficulties and how they may affect classroom performance can enable the teacher to adopt teaching methods and strategies to help them be successfully integrated into the classroom environment. The teachers started by identifying the weaknesses of students in basic English proficiency by examining the daily work, e.g. dictation results, handwriting and spelling problems etc. in a unit of work. Then, the two teachers each selected two students from their own classes as a pilot study giving support focussed on their dyslexia. They opened profiles for the four students to keep track of the students' work, their learning problems and progress.

Both teachers found that the students had great difficulty in spelling and reading. For example, one student made a common dyslexic mistake of directionality when he wrote 'Monbay' as 'Monday.' Student character was also seen as a factor affecting the learning motivation of the students. The teachers also tried to diagnose the four focus students with the help of a dyslexia assessment instrument. The teachers interviewed the students to learn more about their ways of learning, interests and needs. This enriched the profiles of the students and helped the teachers in making pedagogical decisions.

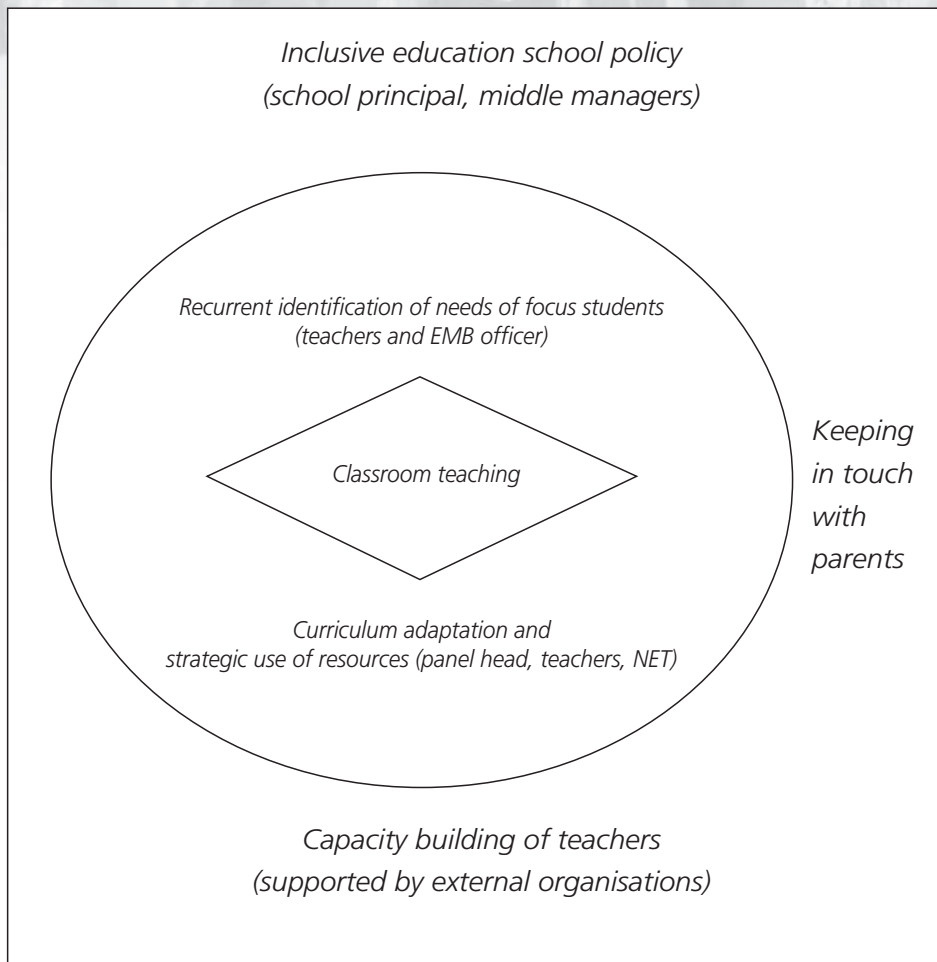
3. Curriculum adaptation and strategic use of resources

In the second term, school resources were further tapped to support the students. Some major curriculum and timetabling changes were made.

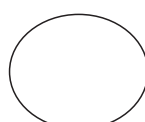
- (i) The students were re-grouped on the basis of examination results. In this way, three of the focus students were put into a smaller sized class where the teacher could pay more attention to individual students.
- (ii) Because some students were observed to have low self-esteem, a confidence-building exercise was devised. At a cross-curricular Valentine's Day function, students had to follow written instructions and a schedule given to them. This helped those weak in organisation and management skills to practise these skills for communication. The teachers also arranged a food ordering role play in a restaurant to create an authentic communication experience.
- (iii) After S7 classes had ceased in March, the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) was able to give the students extra time on Tuesdays for phonics and sound discrimination.
- (iv) In late April the teachers formed a special study group of eight students, including the four focus students, that received weekly tutorials. These tutorials aimed to provide consolidation of lesson content and to address particular problems faced by the students.

4. Classroom instruction

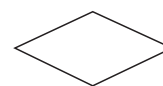
- (i) The teachers adopted a multi-sensory approach using realia and video tapes to help students master the meaning of new words in English lessons.
- (ii) Students were exposed to the topic vocabulary and target sentence structures not only in the initial input but also in revision, quizzes, tests and re-tests, each time with a variety of format, layout and content.
- (iii) The teachers viewed skills training as important. They helped the students build up memory skills in their spelling. For example, a teacher taught her students to memorise the word 'bitter' by associating it with a previously learned word 'butter'. Students were taught to identify and highlight the key words, which were taught in the previous lessons. Scanning skills helped students guess the meaning of longer language patterns, and hence fostered their understanding of the target language.



School level support



Curriculum level planning



Teaching and learning

Building a dyslexia-friendly environment in schools

Impacts

The most successful part of the lessons was that the teachers could see some improvements in student learning even though the progress might be slow. For the focus students, at first they were passive, shy and with low self-esteem, unwilling to learn English at the beginning of the school term. Then they improved, feeling more comfortable and confident in answering questions and trying to finish the tasks on time. The results of dictations and tests and also their motivation have been improving.

Having seen their improvements in learning words and sentence patterns, the students become more confident in dealing with assessments which are used to evaluate students' learning on the recurring language items. Even though the progress has been slow and not remarkable at this stage (as it is in many such classrooms), the students understand that they are being helped on the way. The two teachers have also acquired competency in diagnosing the problems and planning for dyslexic students.



Facilitating factors

The school had a clear policy on special education. The principal and middle managers ensured that the ethos of the school was dyslexia-friendly and informed parents of the dyslexia policy on many occasions. The support from the panel head, the NET, and the LLSS officer relieved much pressure on the two young teachers in managing this new challenge. All these added to the favourable conditions for building a dyslexia-friendly learning environment.

Difficulties and suggestions

The teachers are still facing difficulties when teaching dyslexic students. For instance, the students do not want to be labelled as 'special students'. Therefore, the teachers integrated some challenging items in handouts and tests, which students could choose to answer or omit. They also differentiated the assessments by setting core and non-core parts and kept track of the progress and motivation of the students.

Another difficulty is that the teachers had to adjust the learning objectives from time to time according to students' learning abilities, thus slowing down the planned schedule of work. However, it was pleasing for the teachers to note some improvements in student learning as they had focussed on individual needs.

Students with special learning difficulties can still master a language if they can learn a series of techniques which facilitate their memory of language elements. As this case shows, teachers play an important role in developing these skills, by taking into account their students' interests, expectations and actual needs.

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Teachers interested in knowing more about our Task Force are welcome to contact us.
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