



Preparing junior secondary students for the NSS through the introduction of reading strategies

Background

With the introduction of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum language arts and non language arts modules, teachers are aware of the importance of broadening students' language learning experience through exposing them to a wide range of text types. However, it is not always an easy task for teachers to extend students' learning experience through texts, as students have problems in understanding what they read, which in turn affects how they interact with what they read.

Students who do not know how to read effectively very often have the following things in common:

- They have not been explicitly taught or trained how to read.
- They know little about what they can do to understand what they read.
- They do not have conscious plans that good readers use to tackle texts.

Teachers at St. Louis School observed the above commonalties among students and thought it is necessary to teach students how to read more effectively. As learning to read does not happen automatically, teachers decided to introduce reading strategies to students starting from their junior years in order to help them become more effective and active readers. The teachers believe that this can better prepare their students for their journey through senior secondary where they have to engage in reading a wide range of texts. More importantly, they hope that reading to learn will happen more effectively among the students so that they will become lifelong learners through reading.

Level

S1-2

Strategies used

Explicit teaching of reading strategies is used to help students improve reading comprehension. Studies have revealed that explicitly teaching students even one strategy for comprehending a text can improve their comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley, 2000).

Four steps are involved in giving explicit instruction (Armbruster et al., 2001):

1. Direct explanation

The teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy.

2. Modelling

The teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, by 'thinking aloud' while reading the text that the students are using.

3. Guided practice

The teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy.

4. Application

The teacher helps students practise the strategy until they can apply it independently. (p.53)

The 'Three-phase approach' (Saricoban, 2002) is adopted when teachers choose to introduce various reading strategies to students. For instance, making inferences and visualisation are taught in the while-reading stage, while making comparisons and making connections are taught in the post-reading stage. This helps students raise their awareness of when to use which strategies.

Since learning reading strategies can be quite daunting, interesting short stories are used as an entry point to arouse students' interest in reading and interacting with the text. Other text types such as non-fiction will be used when students can master the reading strategies that they have learned.

What happened

Stage One: Planning

1. Capacity building

Before teachers started to plan the project, they devoted time to getting a better understanding of the topic through reading and discussion. Teachers obtained more ideas about what reading strategies were, what kind of reading strategies could be used and how they could be taught to students. This laid a good groundwork for the collaboration ahead.

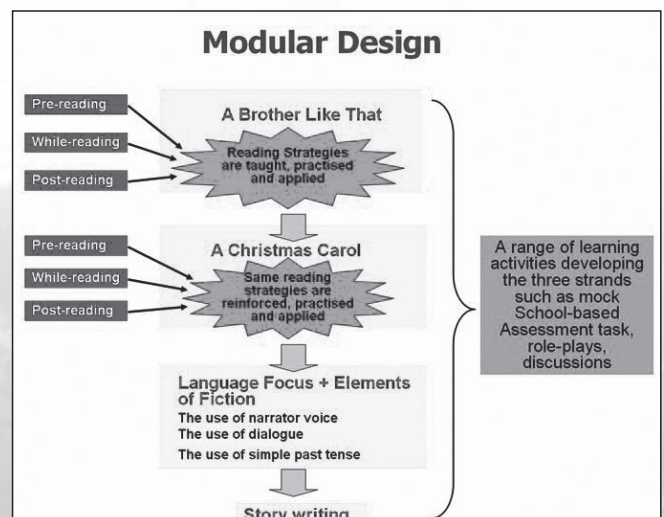
2. Selection of appropriate materials and reading strategies

At the planning stage, teachers chose appropriate reading materials and reading strategies for students very carefully due to their limited prior exposure to reading strategies. A short story 'A Brother Like That' was chosen to replace the textbook passage. A reader 'A Christmas Carol', which is thematically linked to the short story, was chosen to extend students' learning experience. A number of reading strategies were included in the module, namely noticing text structure, making predictions, making inferences, visualisation, making comparison and making connections.

The reasons for the selections were threefold. First, the reading strategies chosen were considered important, yet not too abstract, which would make learning and teaching more manageable. Also, the selected texts were at the right difficulty level and matched students' interest. Students would find it easier to relate to the messages conveyed in the texts than the textbook passage. More importantly, the texts provided rich contexts for developing the reading strategies and teachers could find many examples to illustrate how reading strategies could be applied.

3. Designing a modular plan

Teachers then devised a plan that students first learned and used the reading strategies through reading the short text and then reused the same strategies by using the reader. Various pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities were designed to facilitate the learning of the reading strategies. Apart from the strategies, grammar and the elements of short stories were integrated into the module. A main task, which was interspersed with a range of scaffolding activities developing the three strands, was designed to provide a context for students to integrate and apply what they had learned in writing.



Stage Two: Implementation

1. Developing students' reading strategies step by step

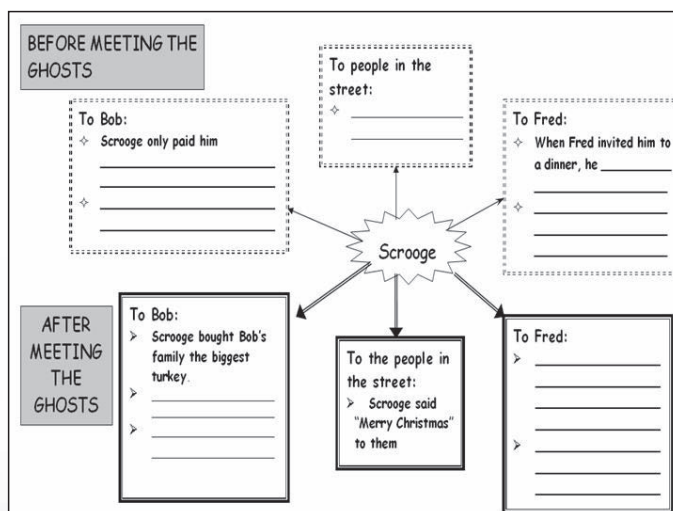
As stated earlier, teachers followed the four steps (direct explanation – modelling – guided practice – application) in helping students develop the reading strategies. In the learning process, students were given opportunities to try out the strategies with varying amounts of guidance and input, according to the learning progression. When students first learned how to make predictions and inferences, they were given more hints such as pictures, contextual clues, and vocabulary. Students were given other reading input and some concrete tips when they first learned how to make text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections. However later, less scaffolding was given and students were expected to apply the strategies more independently as they progressed.

2. Employing various learning materials and a range of activities conducive to the application of reading strategies and language skills

Apart from explicit teaching, a wide variety of materials and activities were used to facilitate students to apply the reading strategies they had learned. For example, students were asked to complete a reading log and practise making inferences when they did independent reading in the module. Graphic organisers were used to help students make comparisons and notice text structure so that they could understand more about the characters and the plot of the texts. Also, students were given other input such as a poem and a newspaper article to do a speaking task that resembles the format of the School-based Assessment tasks, aiming to help them make various kinds of connections. The module also promoted the development of the four skills in an integrated manner, as students needed to apply a variety of skills to complete the activities like writing up a script for a role-play and doing reflection and making a presentation based on what they had read.



Modelling through thinking aloud



Using an organiser to make comparisons

3. Developing students' experience strand and generic skills

As responding and giving expression to real and imaginative experience is one of the skills necessary for the NSS curriculum, development of students' experience strand and generic skills was taken into consideration in the module. Students were provided with opportunities to respond to the characters and the events as well as the messages embedded in the texts with their personal experience. For instance, students were guided to make connections with the characters and their emotions and were then asked to share whether they had similar experiences or whether they would take the same action in speaking and writing activities. Generic skills like creativity, communication and collaboration skills were also fostered through engaging students in creating a script and doing a role-play in groups based on some of the episodes of the reader.

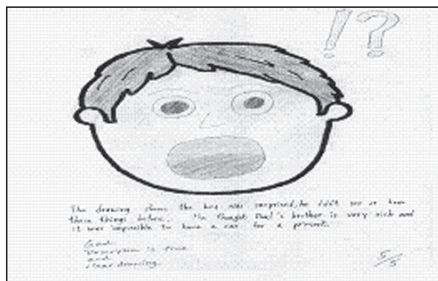
Stage Three: Follow-up action

Extending the impact to other levels

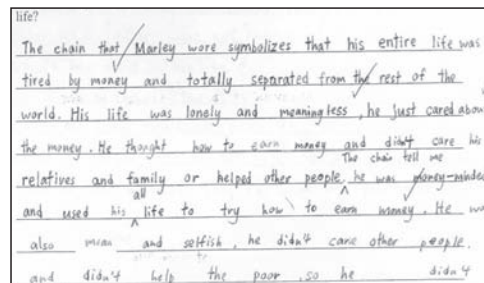
After the module was successfully implemented in S1, the school wanted to extend the positive impact to S2 and S3 in order to prepare for a smoother interface between the junior and the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum. An internal sharing event was held in the school to inform other teachers of the objectives and details of the collaboration. Apart from celebrating teachers' effort and students' achievements, the good practices of the S1 teachers were disseminated and teachers obtained more ideas about how to better prepare students for the future challenges through teaching them reading strategies. After the event, S2 teachers started to co-plan how to introduce reading strategies to students, with reference to the experience gained in S1. Teachers devised a plan similar to the one in S1 and implemented it in May.

Impacts

1. Teachers found that the explicit teaching of reading strategies **helped students improve comprehension**. Students were able to understand the implied meaning of texts and recognise the author's intentions when they were asked to answer questions that required their inferencing skills. It was also evident that students could apply the reading strategies they had acquired in class discussions as well as in their written work where they could make connections with the texts they had read. Some teachers at first thought some strategies such as visualisation might sound unimportant, but they were useful in helping students interact with texts, as students could get a deeper understanding of what they read. In short, it was agreed that the module could hone the reading strategies independent readers need to acquire.



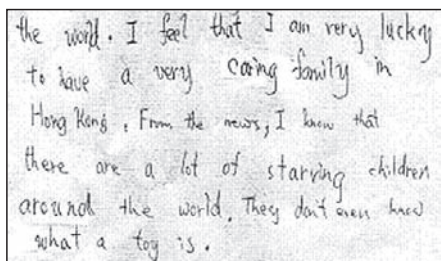
Student applies the strategy of visualisation



Student applies the strategy of making inferences

2. Teachers shared that the co-planned module **helped students develop generic skills** such as creativity, collaboration and critical thinking skills. Students came up with a lot of creative ideas in the scripts they wrote collaboratively. They also included some episodes that do not exist in the original text. Some students expressed some sophisticated ideas in their reflection such as family and love are more important than money.
3. The co-planned module **helped students respond to the characters and events in imaginative texts** by widening their exposure to language arts texts for enabling them to **become more sensitive to feelings**. Teachers also made use of different means to give room for students to develop students' experience strand and they found that students could respond to the texts with a deeper level of comprehension. For instance, students were able to put themselves into the shoes of the characters in the texts and respond to their situations. Students could also reflect upon their own experience and give expression to the imaginative experience.

4. Teachers felt that it was rewarding to see that **students' motivation increased** as they were reading the stories and completing the activities. As the activities in the module were more student-centred, more opportunities were provided for students to apply knowledge and skills learned in different contexts such as role-plays. Students participated more actively in the activities, and less able students were more involved in class.
5. Students from different classes were interviewed, and the results were in line with the teachers' observations. Students thought that they **obtained more ideas about how to read** a text in the module as they were not taught how to make sense of what they read previously and they would just skip the lines when they did not understand. They said they would try to apply the strategies to understand what they read though it was not always easy to do so. In addition, students said the module was helpful because their reading skills had improved. Students also enjoyed reading the short story and the reader and they believed their interest in reading had been enhanced.



Student reflects on his own experience



Doing a presentation



Students sharing in the interview

Facilitating factors

1. Selection of appropriate reading strategies and reading materials as input

The complementary use of the short story and reader was able to sustain students' interest in reading and learning the reading strategies. Students enjoyed reading the texts as they matched students' language abilities and interest level. Besides this, the reading strategies chosen were 'teachable' with the texts, thus easing students' difficulty in learning them.

2. Involvement of dedicated and proactive teachers

The success of the collaboration is attributed to the involvement of enthusiastic teachers who were devoted to developing materials and lessons plans and were willing to set aside their own time for co-planning meetings. The panel chair in the junior forms adopts a proactive approach in managing curriculum change. He sets a good example for teachers by taking an active role in preparing students for their future challenges.



Teachers having a co-planning meeting



One teacher sharing her experience



3. Building of a collaborative and sharing culture

The co-planning meetings have nurtured a collaborative and sharing culture among teachers, which has facilitated the exchange of teaching ideas. During the co-planning meetings with S2 teachers, the teachers who had taken part in the collaboration in S1 were able to offer valuable advice based on their experience gained. The fruitful discussions generated a lot of good teaching ideas.

Difficulties and suggestions

1. Provision of curriculum space, time and resources

Reforming the school-based curriculum entails more than teachers' professional knowledge in the subject. The inclusion of different texts like readers or poems or new strategies in the curriculum requires curriculum space. It also takes time and effort to co-plan and implement activities that bring about desired learning outcomes. Schools need to create space and time for teacher collaboration, allow flexibility in curriculum planning and tap into resources to effect curriculum change.

2. Developing reading skills requires time and opportunities

The development of reading skills is a continuous process for readers of all ages and abilities. Not all students can exhibit substantial progress in reading comprehension within a short time, but the effective use of assessment data can surely inform teachers of students' strengths and weaknesses and help them monitor students' progress. It is also crucial for teachers to build in opportunities for students to use reading strategies in different contexts throughout the school year. Practice makes perfect may sound a cliché, but it is very true when applied to the development of new strategies in students.

Way Forward

To build on the foundation laid this year, the school will infuse a wider range of text types into the junior form curriculum and help students sustain the strategies learned and develop new ones. It is hoped that students will be equipped with the skills necessary for the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum as well as the skills of good readers through this reform.

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Equipping junior form students with School-based Assessment skills

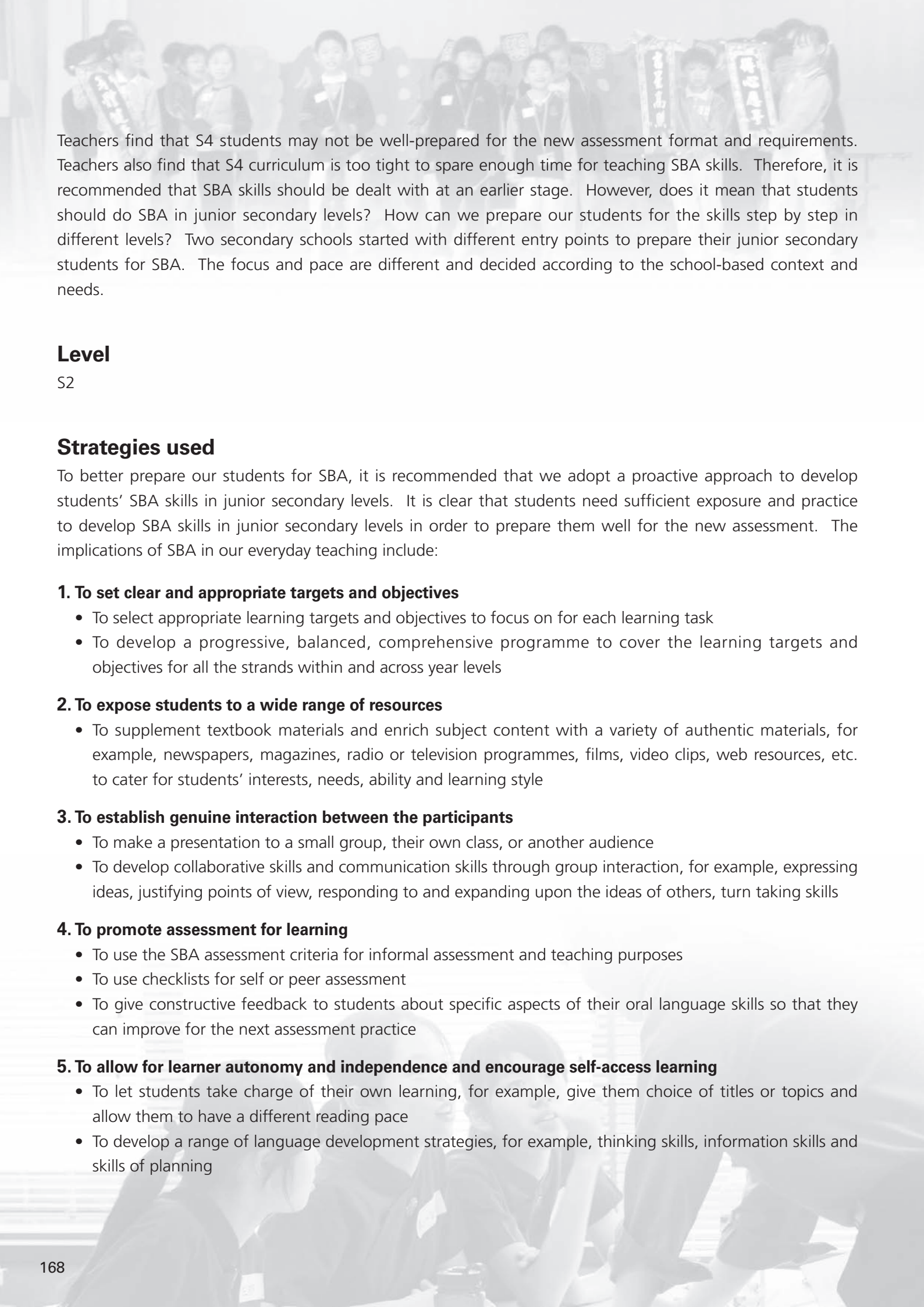
Background

The introduction of a School-based Assessment (SBA) component in the 2007 Certificate Examination (English Language) aims to align assessment more closely with the current English Language teaching syllabus (Curriculum Development Council, 1999) as well as the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum. The SBA component aims to assess learners' achievement in areas that cannot be easily assessed in public examinations, while also enhancing the capacity for student self-evaluation and lifelong learning (Introduction to the School-based Assessment Component, 2006).

One of the reasons for including SBA in the NSS curriculum is 'to promote a positive impact or 'washback effect' on students, teachers and school staff. SBA can serve to motivate students by requiring them to engage in extensive reading and viewing that will help develop their overall language ability; and for teachers, it can reinforce curriculum aims and good teaching practice, and provide structure and significance to an activity that they are in any case involved in on a daily basis, namely assessing their own students' (English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide Secondary 4-6, 2007).

There are four main goals of the SBA component according to the Introduction to the School-based Assessment Component (2006). However, teachers are worried about students' performance as students may not be able to achieve the SBA goals. The table below matches the four main goals with students' limitations.

SBA Goals	Relevant skills	Limitations
Language enhancement goals	Developing discussion and presentation skills, improving stress and intonation, developing more accurate pronunciation, extending vocabulary range, building note-taking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited experience, confidence and language ability in using spoken English as a tool to express and present ideas
Learning how to learn goals	Developing self assessment skills, helping students set achievable language learning goals, demonstrating how to record progress, encouraging independent reading choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited experience in conducting self and peer assessment and reflection on strengths and weaknesses Limited skills and experience in processing language inputs of various genres independently
Social/affective goals	Developing collaborative skills, demonstrating cooperative learning, developing student confidence and self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little confidence in interacting or collaborating with others and using spontaneous speech
Cognitive/general knowledge goals	Developing students' critical thinking skills, extending knowledge of the world, deepening understanding of particular topics, developing student insights in human emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited interest and habit in reading different text types and viewing movies and lack of experience in developing critical minds



Teachers find that S4 students may not be well-prepared for the new assessment format and requirements. Teachers also find that S4 curriculum is too tight to spare enough time for teaching SBA skills. Therefore, it is recommended that SBA skills should be dealt with at an earlier stage. However, does it mean that students should do SBA in junior secondary levels? How can we prepare our students for the skills step by step in different levels? Two secondary schools started with different entry points to prepare their junior secondary students for SBA. The focus and pace are different and decided according to the school-based context and needs.

Level

S2

Strategies used

To better prepare our students for SBA, it is recommended that we adopt a proactive approach to develop students' SBA skills in junior secondary levels. It is clear that students need sufficient exposure and practice to develop SBA skills in junior secondary levels in order to prepare them well for the new assessment. The implications of SBA in our everyday teaching include:

1. To set clear and appropriate targets and objectives

- To select appropriate learning targets and objectives to focus on for each learning task
- To develop a progressive, balanced, comprehensive programme to cover the learning targets and objectives for all the strands within and across year levels

2. To expose students to a wide range of resources

- To supplement textbook materials and enrich subject content with a variety of authentic materials, for example, newspapers, magazines, radio or television programmes, films, video clips, web resources, etc. to cater for students' interests, needs, ability and learning style

3. To establish genuine interaction between the participants

- To make a presentation to a small group, their own class, or another audience
- To develop collaborative skills and communication skills through group interaction, for example, expressing ideas, justifying points of view, responding to and expanding upon the ideas of others, turn taking skills

4. To promote assessment for learning

- To use the SBA assessment criteria for informal assessment and teaching purposes
- To use checklists for self or peer assessment
- To give constructive feedback to students about specific aspects of their oral language skills so that they can improve for the next assessment practice

5. To allow for learner autonomy and independence and encourage self-access learning

- To let students take charge of their own learning, for example, give them choice of titles or topics and allow them to have a different reading pace
- To develop a range of language development strategies, for example, thinking skills, information skills and skills of planning

Since students of different schools have different learning experiences, teachers should make professional judgment to decide on what they actually start working on. Teachers need to understand their students' needs, ability and potential and design units or modules addressing the implications above. It is not necessary to achieve all the SBA goals in one attempt or within one year. It is hoped that a smooth interface between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 can help students scaffold knowledge and skills in the learning process.

What happened

Teachers of FDBWA Szeto Ho Secondary School were interested in reforming their junior English curriculum to provide students with better opportunities to develop their interest and experience in interacting actively with non-print materials. They hope to achieve a meaningful practice of their presentation and discussion skills through performing contextualised tasks. Instead of adding the use of non-print fiction into the curriculum as a discrete element, they saw the merits of enriching their students' learning experience through integrating the use of these motivating language arts materials with the textbook. The teachers also took the opportunity to introduce the practice of peer assessment for the learning of English.

The following article sets out the strategies for preparing students for the interface with the SBA in one module of work.

Components: Activities / Tasks	Rationale
<p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to complete a survey form about their feelings and thoughts on ghosts. They then share ideas in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A survey can help motivate and prepare students to view a film or interact with its subject matter, as students are guided to see its relevance to their prior knowledge or relate it to their perception about the subject.
<p>Textbook materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portray a range of supernatural figures to students, on the basis of inputs from textbook units 1 and 3. Ask students to express feelings and thoughts about them. • Retrieve students' background knowledge on the technical aspects and the categorisation of film production (with reference to learning experience gained in unit 1). • Ask students to name horror films they have watched before and share if they enjoyed watching them through verbal expression or illustrations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare students with vocabulary, textual, technical and background knowledge needed as they are then asked to process, comprehend and/or interact with a film. The teachers schedule their curriculum in advance and help students scaffold the learning of these elements on the basis of their previous learning from the textbook. • It is also considered significant to create a pleasant, engaging classroom environment that encourages students to generate ideas or share experience freely.

<p>The animated film <i>The Canterville Ghost</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the blurb and illustrations on the DVD cover and the trailer, ask students to predict from the context the basic components of the film storyline and discuss in groups. Each group member pays particular attention to particular items. Students working with the same item get together and exchange ideas to revise the notes made. Students return to own group and report to other group members the information obtained from the viewing. Each group modifies and finalises answers on the worksheet. • Ask individual groups to report on the items gathered while other students listen and make suggestions as appropriate. Give feedback on students' answers and make comments on their speaking skills, with the use of a checklist to help students develop their presentation skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers see the necessity to develop strategies in helping students prepare for the viewing of a film. • This also sets up a genuine need for students to follow closely the development of the film to verify whether their predictions are correct, adding interest and challenge to the viewing of the film. • Students are given tasks of different difficulty levels, depending on their ability and readiness. • The teachers provide opportunities for students to practise interaction skills learned in the preliminary stage of the module. They also demonstrate to students the use of a set of rubrics, before asking them to conduct peer assessment for evaluating their presentation skills at a later phase of the module.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play the film by breaking it into scenes (i.e. beginning, developing, central story problem and ending) for viewing. • Before playing each scene, prepare students by giving them a schema with items devised for working out the conflicts and solution developed among the characters in the film. Also ask students to interact with the film by responding to some focussed questions and predict the development of the plot in the next scene. They first present thoughts in groups. Then invite a few to share ideas in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The viewing of a film in parts eases the cognitive load for novice viewers. It also helps avoid students giving up by ensuring students' understanding at regular intervals. • The persistent use of a schema aims to help students focus on the development of the story during the viewing. This as well facilitates the note-taking practice, an important skill needed in the SBA practice. • Group work enhances students' experience in expressing opinions and exchanging thoughts with meaning and purpose.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to first work out own responses for a few questions written on the basis of the film. Next, conduct group discussion. Remind them to use the language or expressions learned in previous lessons. Write down notes concluded from group discussion and then share ideas with another group. • Invite groups to present conclusion in class. Other students write down feedback on peer assessment form. Then ask some students to share comments in class. Teacher follows with feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This post-viewing discussion requires students to work out ideas and thoughts through activating inputs from the film, their prior knowledge and ideas from the textbook. They are also given the chance to apply and improve language skills in giving presentation and conducting discussion. • The teachers also provide chance for students to experience the use of peer assessment in the process of learning. Students are empowered to play an active role in assessment for learning.

Merged use of textbook and film materials

- Ask students to complete a writing task of developing a dialogue between the ghost in the film and the ghost developed from the textbook unit. Introduce the purpose and context of the task. Finally, invite students to share their work in groups and in class.
- This post-viewing writing task aims to provide students with chance to apply ideas and thoughts developed about love and revenge in settling a difficult situation. While this module aims to prepare students for the interface, it also helps develop students' thinking and writing skills.

Teachers of Lions College identified students' needs regarding SBA requirements. Teachers agreed that students did not have enough exposure to discussion and students were not confident to discuss a book or a movie in English. Teachers needed to build up students' discussion skills and confidence before moving towards SBA.

This is a part of a textbook unit, Cartoon Characters, developed by the teachers collaboratively. The major purposes of the lessons are to teach discussion skills including voice, speed, clarity, pronunciation and turn-taking; and to promote the idea of assessment for learning, for example, using assessment criteria as a direction for teaching and learning, and providing useful feedback to learners to facilitate more effective learning outcomes.

Components: Activities / Tasks	Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students who else they would like to talk about with friends, besides cartoon characters. Ask students to prepare information of their favourite singer/artist for a group discussion. Students will introduce their favourite singer/artist to others and tell why they like the person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to use a variety of materials, e.g. web resources or magazines as learning input of their own choice. • Students can apply what they have learned when talking about cartoon characters to discuss their favourite singer/artist.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students how to conduct discussion in groups of 4. Explain the task and introduce the roles of chairperson and members. • Give useful tips for discussion, for example, how to start a discussion, how to take turns, how to clarify information, how to end a discussion, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roles give concrete ideas to students what exactly they are expected to do in the discussion. • The roles can also enable students with great diversity to increase confidence and perform better.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the assessment criteria and focus on the importance of voice, speed, clarity, pronunciation and turn-taking. Choose 4 students to demonstrate how to take turns to ask and answer questions about their favourite singer/artist in class. • Discuss with students if they can achieve the assessment criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For effective learning to take place, students need to know what they are trying to achieve. Communicating assessment criteria involves discussing them with students and providing examples of how the criteria can be met in practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to discuss their favourite singer/artist in groups of 4. Let them prepare well and then ask them to discuss in front of the class. • Introduce the peer assessment form and conduct peer assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers should equip students with the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self and peer assessment. • Self and peer assessment can raise students' awareness towards the assessment criteria.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give feedback to each group. Suggest students how they can further improve their performance, for example, speak louder, slower/faster, clearer; ask more questions, give more details, help the less able students to clarify their answers, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need information and guidance in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Teachers should pinpoint the student's strengths and advise on how to develop them, be clear and constructive about any weaknesses and how they might be addressed, and provide opportunities for learners to improve upon their work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion opportunities are given in other units during the year to allow students to gain practical experience. Timely feedback is given to promote assessment for learning. • Discussion is also used as the speaking assessment task in the term assessment and examination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative assessment happens naturally in the day-to-day classroom learning and teaching when teachers provide feedback to students on how to improve their performance based on the evidence of learning collected. • Teachers are encouraged to make use of both formative and summative assessment to gain a comprehensive picture of students' performance and abilities.

Impacts

On students

In both the school cases, students were motivated to interact actively with authentic materials and saw a need to communicate in English. While they were given ample chance to relate learning to their prior knowledge or life experience, they came up with their own ideas and engaged themselves in meaningful discussion and/or presentation tasks. A stronger sense of audience was thus developed and students became more confident to speak spontaneously and voice their opinions. The self and peer assessment could also increase students' self awareness of their speaking skills and reflection skills.

Students were also brought to see the learning of English from a new perspective. Instead of teaching English simply by using textbook materials, the teachers enriched students' learning experience by adapting and creating purposeful and authentic materials. This approach was, in general, well received as students found learning more interesting. In addition, the teachers were convinced that integrating authentic materials could effectively complement the textbook in helping students develop skills and experience targeted in the SBA.

On teachers

Teachers were able to review the needs of students when preparing for the new initiatives. Different schools might have different entry points for developing an initiative. The most crucial point was whether teachers understood their students and how they catered for their needs, abilities and styles when designing the curriculum.

Teachers gained insight into the importance of holistic curriculum planning. The two cases show initial attempts at preparing students for SBA skills. The most important was how the effort and impacts were sustained. One level curriculum planning was only an entry point. Teachers agreed that systematic planning of learning targets, objectives and skills was essential to all levels to ensure curriculum coherence.

Facilitating factors

Curriculum leadership and teachers' collaboration

The role of curriculum leaders is vital to lead, plan and manage the school-based English language curriculum and its implementation. The leaders must have vision to develop a school-based curriculum based on directions, key emphases and specific focuses provided in the central curriculum and assessment to suit learners' needs, interests and abilities, as well as taking account of teachers' strengths and the school context. The leaders should review and evaluate curriculum planning, implementation and learners' performance regularly and help prepare both the teachers and the students to face new challenges. They should also facilitate the development of a learning culture to share information, knowledge and experiences among teachers.

In the two school cases, the English panel heads worked closely with the panel members to identify the new initiatives and the school needs, and develop teaching plans collaboratively. With shared goals, teachers worked as a team to improve the school-based English Language curriculum. The complexities introduced by a new curriculum and assessment are challenging. Teachers' collaboration makes these complex tasks more manageable, stimulates new ideas, and promotes coherence in a school's curriculum and instruction. The success lies with the concerted effort made by the working team.

Way forward

One level horizontal curriculum planning of SBA is only an entry point for the schools to plan how to equip students with SBA skills. After gaining practical experience in curriculum planning and design, the next step should be cross-level vertical curriculum planning of SBA. The following are suggestions on how to plan a vertically aligned curriculum:

1. Systematic planning of learning outcomes, basic competencies, learning targets and objectives related to speaking in a progressive manner in junior and senior forms
2. Lifelong learning skills and thinking skills to be taught to improve learners' autonomy and independence
3. A quality school-based extensive reading scheme for both junior and senior forms to promote students' reading habit and sharing of ideas and views
4. A progressively scheduled exposure to non-print materials of various types to develop students' linguistic skills, knowledge and interest in audio-visual language inputs
5. Close collaboration among teachers across levels in planning the English Language curriculum to prepare students for the SBA component

As there are targets and objectives to be achieved in order to prepare students for SBA, it takes time to help scaffold students' skills and knowledge from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. There should be careful vertical curriculum planning on what to be achieved in different levels.

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Enhancing the interface between the junior and senior secondary English Language curricula through language arts

Background

With the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum due to be implemented in 2009, many schools are concerned about how they can best prepare their students for this change. One important feature of the NSS English Language Curriculum is the introduction of eight elective modules, four of which (Drama, Poems and Songs, Popular Culture and Short Stories) use language arts texts as a medium for the teaching and learning of English. These electives present challenges to teachers and students. How can schools ease the process of transition? One conclusion is that language arts texts and activities should be introduced in the junior forms. In order to investigate how the curriculum can be adapted to give junior form students exposure to and knowledge of language arts, and how this can help prepare them for the language arts elective modules, three schools under the support of the Language Learning Support Section joined forces to implement a two-year project. A network of interested schools was also set up to share and try out materials and strategies.

Levels

S3 in the first year, followed by S4 in the second year

Strategies used

Project objectives	Strategies used
<p>For teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase teachers' knowledge and skills in language arts • To enhance their effectiveness in delivering the language arts modules in the senior secondary English Language curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network-based professional development events were held for teachers. • Officers undertook co-planning of the curriculum with teachers. • Sharing events were held in which knowledge gained from the project and materials developed were disseminated to schools.
<p>For students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop learners' readiness for the language arts modules at senior secondary level and enhance learning of the Experience Strand by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing their awareness and appreciation of literary texts • building up their understanding and responses to events, characters, issues and themes in the texts • developing their creativity, critical thinking skills and fostering positive values and attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In each school, two language arts modules were co-planned and taught to S3 students. These modules contained a wide variety of language arts texts and activities. • Skills and knowledge required for the NSS language arts electives were identified and integrated into the modules. • In S4, one or two modules based on the NSS language arts electives were co-planned and taught. These built on and developed the knowledge and skills from the S3 units. • Students read or watched imaginative texts, and gave responses. They also produced their own imaginative texts and performances.

What happened

1. Teachers' professional development



Workshops on poetry



First sharing of materials and strategies



Second sharing and workshop on fiction



Final sharing of findings from the project

2. Work in schools

In all three schools, language arts modules were implemented in S3 and S4 with the same group of students. Development of skills and knowledge for the NSS electives was incorporated into the material for both levels. Three different approaches for designing the materials were used:

(i) Infusion mode

Language arts materials and activities are added to textbook units, with the textbook material providing the overall structure.

(ii) Thematic mode

Language arts texts based on a common theme are chosen and provide the structure for the unit. Target language from the textbook may be added and taught in the context of the language arts texts.

(iii) Genre-based mode

A particular genre (e.g. poetry) is chosen and studied in detail through various texts.

The following summaries give an overview of the work of each school.

Liu Po Shan Memorial College

School background

- Students are mainly of average ability, however there is considerable diversity among them in terms of their proficiency and interest in English.
- There are varying degrees of experience in using language arts texts among the teachers.
- The school management is highly supportive of the project and facilitates co-planning and professional development for teachers.

Modules implemented

S3 Modules

Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge
<p>Unit on Friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students wrote cinquain poems describing their friends. • They studied a poem about friendship which contained metaphors and wrote their own poems. • They created a new verse for a song. • They studied the song 'First of May' by the Bee Gees and learned how to interpret it. • They listened to a sample radio drama, studied the features of the text type, wrote and performed their own radio drama scripts on the topic of friendship. 	<p>Knowledge</p> <p><i>Poems and songs</i></p> <p>Knowledge of features of poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different poetic forms • metaphor • syllables and rhythm • rhyme

Unit on Chocolate

- Students tasted and described different kinds of chocolate.
- They wrote Valentine poems using simple rhymes.
- They learned about the life of Roald Dahl and read an extract from his autobiography.
- They watched the movie 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' and evaluated the characters.
- They wrote and presented a review of the movie.
- They created a new product for Mr. Wonka and designed packaging for it.
- They marketed their product by means of a TV commercial.



Product packaging designed by students

Drama

- Knowledge of features of radio drama
- construction of plot
 - scriptwriting
 - expressing feelings using voice and intonation

Fiction

- Knowledge of features of non-print fiction texts
- plot construction
 - character development
 - technical features

Popular culture

- Knowledge of features of packaging design and advertising
- relationship between text and graphics
 - jingles and slogans

Skills

- Making judgements about characters and relating them to evidence in the text
- Evaluating a text
- Presentation skills

S4 Module

Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge	Links to S3
<p>Making a group magazine Students worked in groups to create a magazine on a topic of their choice.</p> <p>The magazine included a range of popular culture text types, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comic strip or photo story • consumer review • biographical article and interview with a celebrity (students imagined themselves as celebrities in adult life) • advice column • cover and contents page 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • story structure and development in the comic strip or photo story • features of the text types taught in the module • the relationship of content and graphics in the magazine cover <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constructing an interesting storyline • telling a story through dialogue • interpreting a writer's opinions • expressing and supporting own opinions • creating graphics which enhance the written products • presentation skills 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learned about plot construction and development for the radio drama and movie review. In S4 they used this knowledge in the photo story. • Students learned about the relationship between graphics and content when designing product packaging in S3. They used this knowledge for the cover and contents in S4. <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students practised using dialogue in the radio drama. • Students learned how to write movie reviews in S3. In S4 they extended this to product reviews.

Students presented and 'marketed' their magazine to classmates or other classes.



Consumer review



Magazine cover designed by students

- In S3, students presented their movie reviews and products. They presented and marketed their magazines in S4.

Generic skills

- Students collaborated with one another in group work and communicated their ideas in presentations and written texts
- They had opportunities to demonstrate creativity in product design both in S3 and S4

Po Kok Secondary School

School background

- Many students do not have the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to language arts texts. They need support in language.
- There are varying degrees of experience in using language arts texts among the teachers but they are open-minded and always ready for new ideas.
- The school management is highly supportive. They are willing to make room for the project.

Modules implemented

S3 Modules

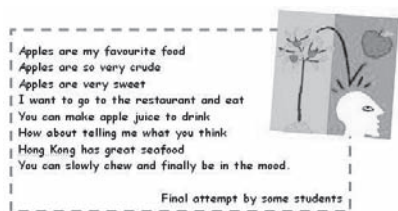
Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge
<p>Unit on Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students watched 'Food, Glorious Food' from the movie 'Oliver!' and wrote acrostic poems and poems with rhymes and alliteration. • Students watched 'Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory'. They analysed and wrote about basic elements of the film. • Students designed promotion strategies and advertisements for Willy Wonka's chocolate factory and their school restaurant. • Students role-played a scene in the school restaurant. <p>Unit on Getting along with Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learned about reading skills and strategies and read the book 'Matilda'. • Students read about Roald Dahl's writing styles and learned to write with more language features. • Students discussed Matilda's world and their world to find out more about differences between cultures. 	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Poems and songs</p> <p>Knowledge of features of poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rhyme • alliteration • simile • metaphor • exaggeration <p>Fiction</p> <p>Knowledge of features of print and non-print fiction texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic elements of a story – plot, setting, characters, theme and message



- Students read and recited a poem called 'The Headmonster'.
- Students designed new outfits for a character in the book, justified their design and held a fashion show.
- Students compared the print and non-print versions of 'Matilda'.
- Students did creative writing on topics like 'Life after Ms Trunchbull'.
- Students prepared a 'Matilda's Magazine'.



'Matilda's Magazine' created by students



Students' food poem

Popular culture

Knowledge of features of promotion materials

- audience analysis
- message
- strategies and slogans

Knowledge of features of teen magazines

- cover
- selection of content
- columns

Skills

- describing characters, making judgements about characters and relating them to evidence in the text
- writing about basic elements of a story
- reading skills and strategies
- poetry recitation skills

S4 Modules

Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge	Links to S3
<p>Unit on Short Stories</p> <p>Students learned to respond to short stories with decreased teacher support. Tasks and activities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read the biography of Paul Jennings to learn about his life. • Students analysed the titles of Paul Jennings' short stories and learned about puns. • Students read the short stories of Paul Jennings and analysed the speech of the characters, openings and closings and twists. • Students responded to short stories using a story review record. 	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Knowledge of features of print and non-print fiction texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic elements of a story – plot, setting, characters, theme and message • pun, speech, opening and closing, twist <p>Popular culture</p> <p>Knowledge of popular culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definition of popular culture • examples of popular culture 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were exposed to a wide variety of language arts texts in S3. They used the knowledge to explore specific genres – short stories and popular culture in S4. • Students learned about the basic elements of a story in S3. In S4 they built on the knowledge to analyse fiction and non-fiction texts in greater depth.



- Students looked at the relationship between colour and culture.
- Students wrote a story review for one of the short stories.
- Students created new story endings.
- Students read, reviewed, and presented short stories of their choice.
- Students learned about storytelling skills and told stories to the class.

Unit on Popular Culture and Films

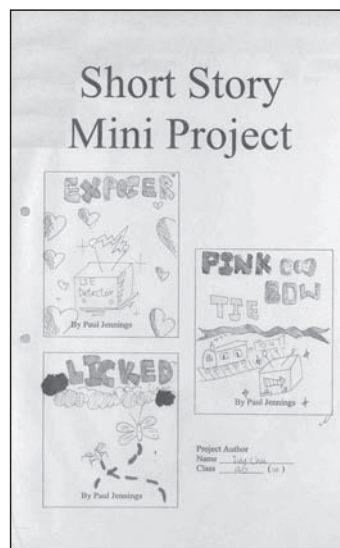
- Students discussed what popular culture is.
- Students took part in intra-class and school-wide popular culture surveys.
- Students learned about films and did film-related vocabulary activities – cloze, crossword and genre bingo.
- Students created film riddles.
- Students discussed what a superhero is and designed their superheroes.
- Students watched 'The Incredibles' and discussed different aspects of a film (e.g. characters, setting, costumes).
- Students read authentic film reviews and learned more about the structure, content and language of a film review.
- Students drafted a film review.
- Students assessed their peers' reviews and improved the first draft.
- Students presented the film reviews.

Knowledge of features of film reviews

- basic elements of a film – plot, setting, characters, theme and message
- costume
- structure
- content
- language

Skills

- Describing characters, making judgements about characters and relating them to evidence in the text
- Analysing fiction and non-fiction by focussing on different aspects (e.g. twist, costume)
- Reading skills and strategies
- Speaking skills (e.g. presentation skills and storytelling skills)
- Skills in doing peer reviews



Short story mini project completed by students



A student's popular culture mind-map

Skills

- In S3, students wrote descriptions about characters and wrote about basic elements of a story. In S4, they wrote a story review on additional features such as twists and costumes following the School-based Assessment format.
- Students learned basic reading skills in S3. They used the skills in S4 to understand and respond to more difficult texts and texts of their choice.

Generic skills

- Students have been given opportunities to develop creativity, communication skills and collaboration skills over the two years. Thinking skills and cultural awareness were infused at a later stage in S3 and S4.
- Students showed collaboration in the first three modules. It paved the way for peer review and detailed peer correction in the last module.

Costume

Frozone's costume is so simple and ordinary. The colour is blue. I think the colour is suitable for him because his super power is creating ice so it matches. Syndrome's costume is boring and informal. I think he is a villain so the writer doesn't want him to upgrade so his costume is white. This colour is not suitable for him because white colour means pure but he is a villain.

A student commenting on the costumes of the characters in 'The Incredibles'

United Christian College Kowloon East

School background

- The school has a language-rich environment where students are used to having English-medium extra-curricular activities like drama, but they perceive the formal English curriculum and these activities as separate entities.
- Learner diversity is a major concern as there is a very wide range of student intake.
- English Literature is a compulsory subject for all junior secondary students.

Targets

To make coherence between English Language and English Literature so that the two subjects can be complementary to each other in helping learners learn and use English through literary texts.

S3 Modules

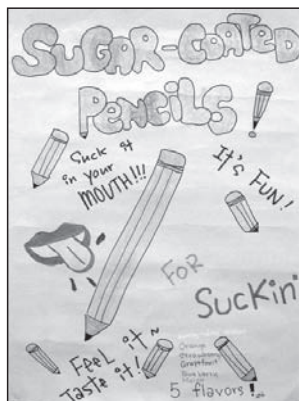
Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge
<p>Three units were conducted around the topic of food.</p> <p>Unit 1: Food, glorious food (Poetry)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students sampled different kinds of food to describe and compare their tastes and textures in different conditions. • Under teachers' guidance or in collaboration they studied ten poems in various forms on the theme of food. • They acquired a comprehensive understanding of the poetic devices used in these poems. • They wrote and read one another's poems about their favourite food. <p>Unit 2: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Print and non-print fiction)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students watched and talked with one another about their initial response to the movie 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'. • They learned how to write a synopsis for the story and designed a book jacket. • The personality and background of the different characters in the story were focussed on through a matching game. • They read excerpts from the abridged or original texts to gain a better understanding of the characters' background and personality before they <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role-played a teacher and wrote a school report about one of the characters; • wrote about an imaginary day that they spent at school with one character. • Two chapters from the original text were studied intensively to focus on the language (adjective patterns) for describing the various products in the Factory. • Students designed a poster for a new food product that they invented for the Wonka Factory. 	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Poems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different forms: acrostic, diamond, shape, rhyming verse • Poetic devices: rhyming words, metaphor, simile • Verse speaking performance <p>Fiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a synopsis • Character study: Interpreting and relating fictional characters to real life • Features of a book blurb <p>Popular culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster design <p>Language skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of adjective clauses and adjective patterns for description • Collaborative learning <p>Generic skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Creativity

Unit 3: Too Much versus Too Little (Performance)

- Students gave a dramatic enactment of an English language camp in which they appealed to young children not to waste food. The performance incorporated prose-reading, solo/choral speaking and a slide show.



Students' performance




Product poster



Students' work: acrostic poem, book jacket

S4 Modules

Tasks and activities	Language arts skills and knowledge	Links to S3
<p>Elective module: Learning English through Short Stories</p> <p>Unit 1: Traditional short stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learned how to respond to texts using some interactive reading strategies. • They studied a modern fairy tale ('Dragon, Dragon') intensively under teacher's guidance to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the features of traditional stories; • discuss the writing techniques. • They read four other traditional stories to practise interactive reading strategies and picked two stories to compare the plot, textual features, impact and level of enjoyment. 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' intensive reading of different literary texts written by some famous writers • Textual features of traditional stories (fairy tale, myth, fable and trickster tale) • Exposure to modern short stories of different types: crime and detection, humour • Writing styles and techniques: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characterisation • humour • personification • colloquialism • exaggeration / caricature • use of dialogues 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' exposure to fiction has progressed from a children's story to short stories of different types and styles. • They have also moved from extensive reading for global understanding to intensive reading for a greater awareness of the theme and writing techniques.

<p>Unit 2: Modern short stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students studied a crime story ('Lamb to the Slaughter') intensively to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interpret the title; • understand the main character's emotions and motives behind her actions before, during and after the murder. • They applied their knowledge of interactive reading strategies to read three other stories and summarise them according to the plot structure. • The significant language features and writing style of each story were focussed on, with practice given. • A close examination was conducted on the dialogues in the stories within the module for storytelling and character portrayal. • Students wrote a story to caricature a celebrity with prominent physical features or personality traits. 	<p>Language skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading skills and interactive reading strategies (i.e. question, predict, visualise, connect, respond) • Comparing stories • Dictionary skills • Writing dialogues • Using exaggeration in story writing • Individual presentation and group discussion in the format of a School-based Assessment task 	<p>Language skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learned to differentiate supporting details from the gist at S3 when summarising a movie/novel. At S4, they wrote synopses for different stories in different formats for a variety of purposes. • Students' understanding and enjoyment of fictional texts were enhanced through repeated practice and application of the interactive reading strategies. • Their ability in creative writing was built up progressively through guided discussion and analysis of the texts and writing techniques. <p>Generic skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking skills: Reasoning and analytical interpretation • Creativity
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Impacts

Teachers have.....

- become more confident in using language arts texts and in designing their own materials
- developed a stronger collaborative culture
- become more aware of students' learning needs
- gained a better understanding of how to approach the NSS elective modules
- acquired more knowledge of how to assess language arts tasks

Students have.....

- experienced a wide variety of language arts texts and learned to recognise their specific features
- developed skills such as character analysis which can be applied to different types of fiction texts
- gained confidence in certain skills areas, for example in speaking and writing
- improved in generic skills such as collaboration through the use of group work in the project and learned how to improve their work through listening to peer feedback

Schools have.....

- gained insights into how to design or restructure the curriculum to provide students with more experience of language arts texts in the junior forms
- gained some experience of implementing a genre-based module similar to the NSS electives

Facilitating factors

- **Support from the school management** proved to be very important in ensuring the successful running of the project. Where special provisions such as regular times for collaborative planning could be made, teachers were able to gain a better understanding of the language arts texts to be taught, develop a sharing culture, and gain experience of designing materials together.
- **Teachers' readiness to embrace change** was also an important factor. However, teachers also needed time to understand the changes and prepare themselves. Since their workload was very heavy, it was sometimes difficult for them to assimilate what had been discussed in the co-planning meetings.
- **Teachers' flexibility in catering for students' needs and interests** also affected the success of the project in various schools. In some cases, it was necessary to modify materials and teaching plans to allow for student diversity. Where teachers were willing to tailor materials or employ appropriate strategies, students' performance was generally better.

Difficulties and suggestions regarding the interface with the NSS

- The experiences of all three schools suggest that integrating language arts in the junior secondary curriculum can help equip students with skills and knowledge required for the language arts electives of the NSS. However, all the schools reflected that it would be better to start the process earlier than S3. In some schools, students who were not accustomed to language arts activities failed to see them as a means to improve their performance in English. They felt that they were 'out of syllabus'. For this reason, teachers felt that it would be easier to integrate language arts from S1, when students are more open-minded and less examination-oriented.
- In some schools, this problem was exacerbated by the fact that the internal examinations did not reflect the work done on language arts during the term. In future, it will be necessary for schools to adapt assessment practices to take account of these changes in the curriculum. Schools may consider adopting continuous assessment or the use of portfolios, which are suitable methods for assessing students' performance in language arts activities.
- It is important for teachers to understand the characteristics of a text type or particular text before using it in the classroom. After analysing the text carefully, teachers will be able to decide the teaching objectives, the teaching strategies to be used and the criteria for assessment.

Materials used by the schools

Poems and Songs:

- 'First of May' words and music by Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb. In: The Very Best of the Bee Gees. Polydor.
- 'Food Glorious Food' by Lionel Bart. From the film Oliver! (1968).
- 'The Headmonster' by Wes Magee. In: Wes Magee Reading from his Poems, published by the Poetry Archive.
- 'Spaghetti' by Frank Flynn. Website : <http://heatheranne.freeservers.com/childrens/Spaghetti.htm>.
- 'Landscape' by Celia Warren. In: Food Rhymes (1998). Oxford University Press.
- 'Beans' by Mike Jubb. In: Food Rhymes (1998). Oxford University Press.



Short Stories:

- 'The Ex-poser', 'Pink Bow Tie' and 'Licked' by Paul Jennings. In: Thirteen Unpredictable Tales (1997). Puffin Books.
- 'Dragon, Dragon' by John Gardner. In Dragon, Dragon: And Other Tales (1975). Random House.
- 'Lamb to the Slaughter' by Roald Dahl. In The Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl. (1992). Penguin.
- 'Demeter and Persephone' by Anne Terry White. In Prentice Hall Literature Bronze (1996). Prentice Hall.
- 'The Four Dragons' (n.d.) Website : <http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/4drag.html>.
- 'How the Animals Kept the Lions Away' by Inea Bushnaq. In Prentice Hall Literature Bronze (1996). Prentice Hall.
- 'Utzel and His Daughter Poverty' by Isaac Bashevis Singer. In Prentice Hall Literature Bronze (1996). Prentice Hall.
- 'Sarah Tops' by Isaac Assimov. In Prentice Hall Literature Copper (1996). Prentice Hall.
- 'Thank you, M'am' by Langston Hughes. In Prentice Hall Literature Silver (1996). Prentice Hall.
- 'The Day I Got Lost' by Isaac Beshevis Singer. In Prentice Hall Literature Silver (1996). Prentice Hall.

Novels:

- Dahl, R. (1999) Matilda (Penguin Joint Venture Readers) abridged version published by Longman.
- Dahl, R. (1965) Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Puffin Books.

Films:

- 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' (2005). Warner Brothers.
- 'Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory' (1971). David L. Wolper Productions.
- 'The Incredibles' (2004). Walt Disney Pictures.

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Social issues for thinking and debating : coherent curriculum mapping of non-language arts components

Background

To many English teachers, non-language arts components such as social issues and debating are new and challenging areas. Some prevalent views are: debating is usually conducted outside class time and in a very formal manner and only a small number of 'elite' students can cope with social issues and debating. English teachers from a relatively new CMI school have explored the use of social issues and debating for average and less able students. Social issues can be valuable input for weaker students to develop thinking skills for writing and enrich world knowledge. Many authentic materials such as newspaper articles and language arts texts touch on social issues and are very relevant to students' lives. They are also rich resources for debating activities in the classroom which offer meaningful learning experiences balanced in both language and critical thinking.

English teachers at this school started preparation work last year. They saw a need for exposing students to not just language arts components but also non-language arts components and so integrated non-language arts components coherently in the whole year plan. After reviewing the school-based English curriculum, they incorporated social issues, newspaper articles and language arts texts into task-based modules. They then made use of social issues to develop basic thinking and debating skills (please refer to the S1 whole-year plan for details about the skills) for enhancing writing and speaking respectively. Through such a curriculum initiative, English teachers would also like to achieve the following:

- Develop a coherent and balanced school-based English language curriculum at junior secondary level by coherently integrating non-language arts components into task-based modules to help students build a solid foundation for the new senior secondary English language curriculum
- Develop students' thinking skills for writing and debating skills for speaking
- Develop teachers' capacity as effective curriculum designers and leaders

Level

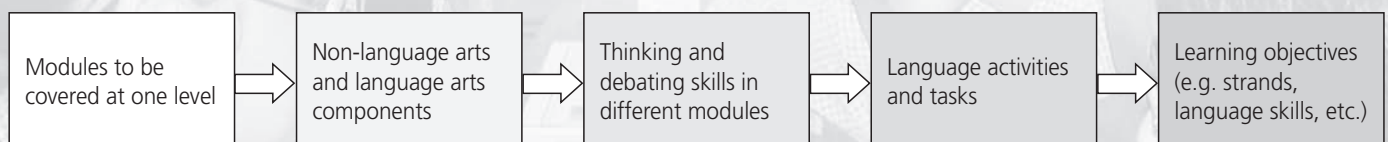
S1

Strategies used

The following strategies were adopted at the planning and implementation stages:

1. Conducting systematic curriculum mapping at the initial stage

At the preliminary stage, English teachers spent much time on reviewing the S1 school-based English curriculum and identifying modules with room for integrating social issues for thinking and debating. A thorough curriculum mapping was carried out from broad areas to specific areas in the following:



2. Integrating non-language arts components with other components in the school-based English curriculum for students' balanced development in different aspects

English teachers wanted to provide students with a more diversified and balanced English curriculum. At the initial stage, they included both language arts and non-language arts components. A variety of newspaper articles and language arts texts about social issues were used for developing thinking and debating skills. Students had to integrate the four language skills in the learning process, discuss social issues and apply generic skills such as communication and critical thinking skills.

3. Forming a network to obtain input from other schools and generate useful knowledge

English teachers obtained input from other teachers in a network formed for the Project on *Social Issues for Thinking and Debating*. In the networking activity, schools with experience in using social issues exchanged views and materials on the use of social issues and debating and gained insights from each other.

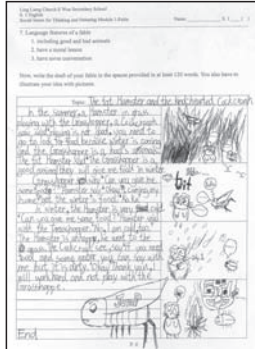


4. Internal sharing and peer lesson observation among panel members for professional development

With full support from the Principal and the English panel head, English teachers involved in the curriculum initiative were encouraged to share in panel meetings and in the school newsletters. Other English teachers were also invited to observe the English lessons and give feedback on the initiative.



What happened

Task-based modules & *issues/ social issues	Thinking skills covered	Debating skills covered	Examples of learning activities conducted to develop thinking and debating skills (English teachers also adapted textbook materials and used a variety of materials and activities to support students' learning)
<p>1. Managing my life at school and at home -</p> <p>*Setting goals to plan ahead for my life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify causal relationships (e.g. causes & consequences) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand more than one point of view in a situation Give supporting reasons for one's standpoint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read traditional and modern versions of fables to get to know the causes and consequences of actions as well as different perspectives. Completed mind-maps on fable components and performed role-plays. Wrote fables to show good and bad actions and consequences. Set goals for the future with supporting reasons. <p>Students expressing causes and consequences in fables</p> 

<p>2. School life: Key to getting along with others -</p> <p><i>*School bullying</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify causes and consequences • Adopt more than one point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an appropriate tone of voice to show different viewpoints • Give reasons for a standpoint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watched a short film and newspaper articles about bullying and discussed some causes and consequences. • Formed into debating circles. Adopted different points of view and gave arguments against bullying from different perspectives. <div data-bbox="916 488 1350 667" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Students gave arguments and counter-arguments for bullying and adopted different points of view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read different comic strips on bullying for discussions. Created new endings.
<p>3. Enjoying Life: Shopping and holiday trips -</p> <p><i>*Stealing for money</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and analyse causes and consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give supporting reasons for one's stand • Use different presentation skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed scenarios with dilemmas. Analysed the causes, reasons and consequences. • Read news reports on shoplifting for discussions. <div data-bbox="810 1010 1461 1160" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Let's have debating for all students!</p>
<p>4. Let's Celebrate Together -</p> <p><i>*Helping those in need : charitable organisations in Hong Kong</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify and analyse causes and consequences • Suggest solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use basic persuasive skills to convince different parties • Apply basic research skills to collect information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listened to a song on charity. Expressed feelings about the song. Discussed reasons for helping the needy. • Formed into debating circles with each circle representing a charitable organisation helping the aged, disabled children, orphans and poor children in China. Conducted research on the topic and made oral presentations to persuade the audience to donate money. <div data-bbox="906 1599 1414 1783" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Oral presentations of projects on different charitable organisations</p>

<p>5. Animals -</p> <p><i>*Cruelty to animals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View issues from different points of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply persuasive skills learned • Give arguments and counter-arguments in given situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read some animal poems and discussed feelings and thoughts about them. Adopted the perspectives of a master and a pet. • Played the role of a pet and wrote a letter to put forward counter-arguments for abandoning animals on the streets. • Wrote animal poems in groups and individually on cruelty to animals.
<p>6. Eating out -</p> <p><i>*Commercials – Believe them or not?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge the validity of statements based on evidence and relevance of points given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spot obvious fallacies with supporting reasons • Give arguments for one’s standpoint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read advertisements and newspaper articles about food. • Distinguished between fact and opinion and discussed the advertisements. • Adopted different points of view and identified obvious fallacies in peers’ arguments.

Impacts

English teachers found the experience of mapping out non-language arts components very valuable as they could acquire useful professional skills in designing a more coherent and balanced school-based English language curriculum. They thought that they had dispelled the myths about using social issues and debating as there were positive impacts created on average and less able students’ learning and motivation. One of their observations was that moving away from the textbook and using a great variety of learning materials on interesting social issues had made the English lessons more interesting and meaningful to students. They thought that they could also exert a positive influence on other teachers.

As debating activities such as forming into different debating circles were designed according to students’ abilities and needs, students showed active participation. There were improvements made in both writing and speaking due to the development of thinking and debating skills. In writing, students were able to group ideas, give reasons, causes and consequences and express them clearly. In speaking, there was more marked improvement displayed in students’ ability to organise ideas coherently, give counter-arguments and adopt different points of view. Students also showed enhanced presentation skills such as eye-contact, body language, etc. The use of social issues could develop positive values among students and foster whole-person development.

Facilitating factors

1. Progressive development of thinking and debating skills to scaffold student learning

- Teaching of basic thinking and debating skills at the initial stage and of more difficult skills at a later stage
- Systematic giving of input (e.g. choice of social issues, materials and activities etc.) to students in different modules to support their gradual acquisition of thinking and debating skills

2. Systematic collection of student learning evidence to change teachers' mindsets

- In-depth analysis and evaluation of students' work at various stages to find out their achievements
- Lesson observation of students' performance in using social issues and debating for learning English by other teachers for professional development

3. Mobilising enthusiastic core teachers to be curriculum designers and leaders

- Core teachers taking the lead to plan and implement the curriculum initiative as well as conceptualise school-based experiences to other English teachers
- Developing a network on social issues to form a learning community in which core teachers take a proactive role in planning and implementing curriculum initiatives and become curriculum leaders for other teachers

4. Obtaining full support from the Principal and the panel head

- Full support given by the Principal and the panel head who see that the curriculum initiative can be developed into a good practice for other schools' reference
- The initiative was one of the prioritised tasks in the English panel

Difficulties and suggestions

Difficulties	Suggestions
Teachers' deep-rooted misconception: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrong beliefs held about the teaching of social issues and debating which are only for more able students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change teachers' mindsets by having more frequent sharing, lesson observation and analysis of students' achievements and problems
Inexperience in holistic curriculum planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of experience in<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. whole-year planning2. including social issues and debating in task-based modules3. integrating them with other components in the school-based English curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spend ample time on curriculum mapping of non-language arts components and other components in the school-based curriculum like language arts at the initial stage• Integrate non-language arts components coherently into task-based modules and avoid covering them separately• Form a network with other schools to explore the use of social issues and debating and to exchange professional ideas and materials
Difficulty in setting clear targets for student learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers' general feeling that social issues and debating are extremely broad areas for them to identify clear targets to aim at in designing the materials and teaching lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify more measurable and specific targets such as developing specific thinking skills for improving writing and specific debating skills for improving speaking (please refer to the S1 whole-year plan)• Map out specific thinking and debating skills to be developed at one level first and link them with students' language development



Way forward

English teachers of this school will extend the curriculum initiative from S1 to other levels and integrate non-language arts components into the whole-year plans at junior secondary level. It is hoped that after systematic cross-level curriculum mapping, students can have a balanced development in different aspects and build a firm foundation for the new senior secondary English language curriculum. The experiences gained this year can serve as reference for other English teachers to develop a coherent and balanced school-based English language curriculum. This is also one of the ways to support Liberal Studies teachers apart from making cross-curricular links with cross-curricular planning. The school has also joined the network formed by participating schools in the Project on Social Issues for Thinking and Debating and may be able to generate useful knowledge for other schools interested in using social issues and debating in English lessons in the future.

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Economical use of resources to infuse language arts into the English curriculum at junior secondary level in preparation for the NSS

Background

When the school learned about the EMB's invitation to all CMI schools in Hong Kong to apply for the English Enhancement Grant (EEG) in March 2006, they decided to try for this sum of 3 million dollars with the hope of strengthening the learning and teaching of English. However, the school did not want to rush into writing a proposal which they were expected to carry out over a period of 6 years. They would rather spend more time thinking carefully about which direction to go, what measures to adopt and whether they are suitable to their school context, at least for the first three years of implementation. As a result, they submitted the proposal in the second batch which meant the school would wait till September 2007 to get the grant for the enhancement measures undertaken. The school could have chosen not to do anything before they got the money. But to better prepare students to meet the challenges of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language curriculum, the school decided to kick off in the 2006 school year. Thus, it is important they make economical use of whatever resources they have in hand to get the most out of what they plan to achieve.

Existing resources the school can make use of include the following:

Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Language Support Officer (LSO) from Language Learning Support Section• the group of pioneer teachers• the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET)• the teacher librarian
Physical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• moving into a new school campus means that they have more space for doing split class teaching, oral and drama practice
Time resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• English and language arts lessons of each class are taught by the same English teacher, with the NET co-teaching in some, thus enabling more flexibility with the use and interchangeability of lesson time• building collaborative lesson planning time in the time-table to ensure regular meetings for professional discussions between the officer and the teachers
Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• money from sources other than the English Enhancement Grant (EEG), like the Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG), library grant, etc.
Outside resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EMB and tertiary institutions offering courses in the form of seminars or workshops for professional upgrading of teachers
Administrative support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• releasing teachers to attend courses for professional development

Language arts is one of the two proposed modules in the elective part of the NSS English Curriculum. Thus teachers feel the earlier the introduction of language arts, the smoother is the transition from junior secondary to senior secondary levels.

Level

S1

S1 was chosen because they will be the first group of students taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2012 under the NSS academic structure and six years is the length of time in which funding of the English Enhancement Scheme (EES) is granted to each applying school.

Strategies used

As this is not meant to be a short-term programme but one that lasts for a number of years extending from the junior to the senior levels, some sort of road map for the first three years was worked out as below:

Focus	Sub-focus	Time	Target	Strategy
Language Arts (to prepare for the language arts electives of NSS)	Stories	Year 1	S1	Storytelling
	Drama	Year 2	S1	Storytelling
			S2	Role play and drama
	Popular Culture	Year 3	S1	Storytelling
			S2	Role play and drama
			S3	Getting to know different kinds of popular culture

This **progressive development of the programme** involving one level of students every year means that teachers who are more ready will start first, then gradually more and eventually all teachers will be able to take up the challenges that language arts electives in the NSS pose. In this way, the school will have sufficient time to train teachers in handling different forms of language arts texts stage by stage as well as to develop a specific focus for every year to ensure the attainment of vertical continuity in the English curriculum and long-term planning for the development of curriculum leadership.

In the absence of funding from the EEG to subsidise any kind of professional development activities for teachers, the school started off with stories because, of the many language arts genres, stories are what teachers have most confidence and experience in teaching. However, their focus has to shift from mere understanding of the story text through answering of close questions to development of students' skills in both reading and speaking. A strategy of **building on teachers' strengths** is important when new initiatives have to be taken up.

Even though teachers could not enroll in in-depth courses on NSS electives before the money was granted, they were encouraged to **take part in the half-day or one-day courses, offered free of charge by the EMB and tertiary institutions**, to gain some basic understanding on how to teach poetry, fiction, drama and storytelling. This knowledge might not allow teachers to carry out classroom teaching competently and confidently, but at least it shed light on what each elective entails and how teachers can go about with it.

Arrangement of **collaborative lesson planning time** is another strategy the school employed to provide teachers with a platform to share information on courses attended, a breeding ground for teaching ideas on the chosen stories as well as teaching strategies and teaching plans for classroom implementation and last of all a common period for reflection. No extra money was called upon but provisions were made by the school administration in the time-tables of teachers involved.

By **aligning the development focus of the English Department** in the next couple of years **with the application for the EEG**, the school hopes to streamline the work teachers have to do rather than overburden them with add-on tasks. While students learn the different forms of language arts inside the classroom, they get a chance to consolidate or extend what they learn outside the classroom by putting on related performances in the Language Arts Festival. This is held once every year towards the end of the school term. Parallel to this, morning reading time and promotion of reading by the library all add to developing in students a reading habit that sustains their lifelong learning.

What happened

What stories to choose

Stories have a most crucial role to play if teachers are to do story-reading and storytelling with students. But, the only book students have, apart from their GE course book, is a book containing many dialogues organised under different themes. This book is supposed to give students maximum oral practice and is a book chosen by the previous NET.

After going through the whole book, teachers felt that the dialogues might not appeal to students' interests and they would rather expose students to stories rather than conversational texts. Teachers then looked into fables, fairy tales, traditional and on-line stories, etc. and finally chose four, (1) The Rich Man and the Shoemaker, (2) The Father, the Son and the Donkey, (3) The Pied Piper of Hamelin and (4) How the World Began. Interest level and suitability level were two reasons for choosing them and four stories were chosen because there were four classes of S1. Teachers would like each class to be in charge of presenting one story in the Language Arts Festival.

When to teach

Teaching of these stories was conducted throughout the whole year, interspersed with the teaching of the GE course book. Instead of designating two fixed periods per week for the teaching of a story, teachers could complete the teaching cycle for a particular story using the number of lessons they planned before switching back to the course book. By doing so, the flow of teaching could be maintained while students' momentum of learning a story could be sustained.

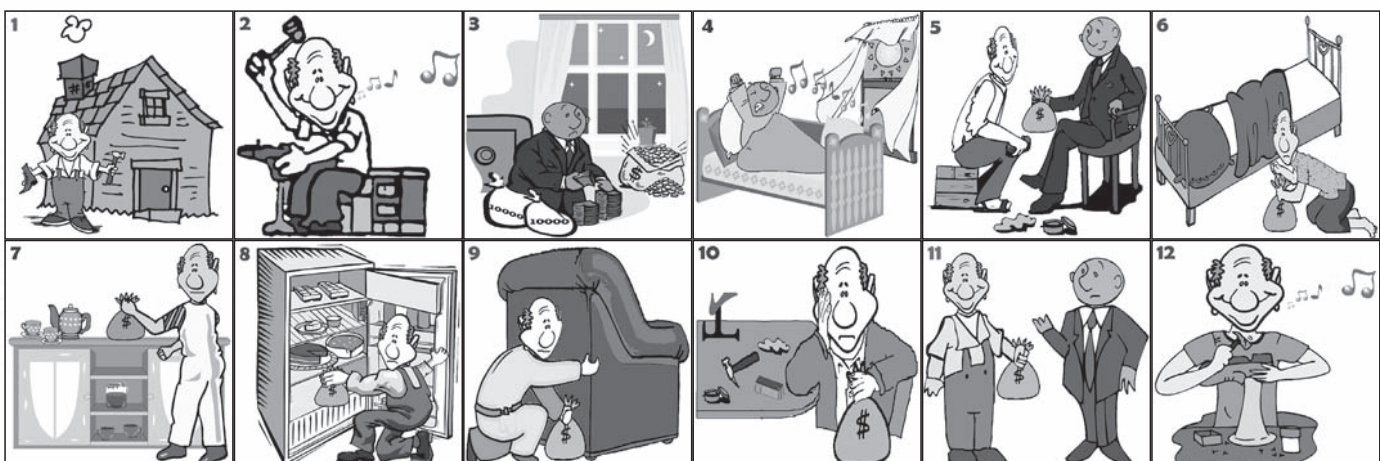
How to teach

Teachers did not aim at just teaching students what the stories were about, but also at familiarising them with the story features and teaching them reading skills. Teachers also built in speaking opportunities for students to interact with each other about the story text through free expression of ideas and exchange of personal experience.

The teaching plan of the story of 'The Rich Man and the Shoemaker' is included to show how.

Teaching procedure	Skills covered
Lead-in 1. Set the scene with the use of the pictures of the two main characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the poor shoemaker (poor but happy)• the rich man (rich but unhappy) Ask students to guess the reason(s)	Prediction
Pictures 1 to 5 2. Pair up students. Shuffle the sentences from pictures 1 to 5 and ask students to arrange them in the correct order. 3. Check answers with students using the enlarged pictures. Stick the pictures on board next to the corresponding sentences.	Sequencing
4. Introduce the story element of 'Setting' to students. Setting usually consists of elements like who , when and where but there is just the who and where found in the 5 sentences.	Elements of story map

<p>5. Ask students what they would do if they were the shoemaker getting money from the rich man in return for not singing. Allow students to express their ideas before referring them back to the story.</p>	<p>Free expression of ideas</p>
<p>Pictures 6 to 9</p>	
<p>6. Show both the picture and the sentence in picture 6 to students. Draw students' attention to the use of conversation and repetitive sentences in picture 6 to prepare them to write the sentences for pictures 7 to 9.</p>	<p>Familiarisation with the use of language in story writing</p>
<p>7. For pictures 7 to 9, show the pictures only and ask them to write the sentences.</p>	<p>Generation of ideas from pictures</p>
<p>8. Compare students' answers with sentences in the story.</p>	<p>Elements of the story map</p>
<p>9. Introduce another story element 'Events'</p>	<p>Elements of the story map</p>
<p>Pictures 10 to 12</p>	
<p>10. Have students compare the emotions of the shoemaker in picture 10 with picture 2 (feeling happier before but worried now). Ask students why there is such a change of feelings/emotions in the shoemaker.</p>	<p>Rationalise the change of emotion</p>
<p>11. Introduce the story element of 'Problem'.</p>	<p>Elements of the story map</p>
<p>12. Ask students what they would do to solve the problem if they were the shoemaker.</p>	<p>Free expression of ideas</p>
<p>13. Show students what the shoemaker in the story does.</p>	<p>Free expression of ideas</p>
<p>Closing</p>	
<p>14. Distribute to students the whole story. Highlight the following story features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of present tense in the story • language used in storytelling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'This story is about ...' • repeated use of the sentence pattern, e.g. 'I must hide ...' 	<p>Familiarisation with the use of language in story writing</p>





Impacts

On curriculum

Gradual development of a school-based language arts curriculum arising from needs of students and teachers to help them face challenges brought by the NSS. This curriculum has components of short stories in year 1, drama in year 2 and popular culture in year 3. And since it is accumulative in nature, the same process is repeated the following year leading to the improvement of the curriculum.

On teachers

Insights into how different forms of language arts texts can be handled with the incorporation of language skills like reading and speaking and the development of a collaborative and sharing culture in the English panel.

On students


Emerging interest among students in learning English through stories as teachers have adopted a student-centred approach involving the use of PowerPoint slides, engaging students in singing songs and drawing pictures and doing discussions and role plays to maximise their participation in class. Seeing their own production of plays on stage in the Language Arts Festival enabled them to see the purpose of learning the stories and how classroom learning could be extended into the informal curriculum.

Facilitating factors

The school did not simply impose the project onto the teachers but underwent the processes which Michael Fullan suggested in the face of any kind of change: informing all staff, here the English panel members about **what** changes are being implemented, **why** the changes are being implemented, **when** they are to be implemented, **how** they will impact on the school and on them personally and **what** they will need to do differently in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and knowledge. Once teachers are well informed about the direction they are going and what changes lie ahead, they are more ready to take up challenges and be pioneers. Thanks to the receptiveness of this group of pioneer teachers to new ideas and their readiness to open up their classrooms for lesson observation, a lot of professional exchange concerning the betterment of the project was made possible.

Difficulties and suggestions

Inexperience of teachers in teaching language arts meant that they were in need of professional development in this field. However, the *lack of funding* prevented teachers from enrolling in courses which require them to be released from their teaching duties. To solve this problem, the Language Support Officer (LSO) brought to meetings all the reading materials and ideas she could get hold of and discussed with teachers in the collaborative lesson time. In this way, teachers' capacity was built up by **working on collective wisdom** and the **trial and error experiences generated from classroom implementation**. As well as language courses that cost money, there are some offered either on weekdays or at weekends by the EMB and tertiary institutions which teachers can attend. With the school's blessing, **teachers take turns in attending the courses and come back to do internal sharing**.



Inappropriate choice of language arts materials by NETs no longer at the school meant that the working team had to spend time searching for suitable materials and working out appropriate teaching strategies. Fortunately, each team member helped look for stories. Then they rewrote them adjusting the level of difficulty and adding illustrations to increase their interest level. The end-products were well-received by students and **teachers developed a sense of ownership in what they designed.**

The school *did not manage to get a new NET* until December 2007. As a result, tasks originally planned for the NET fell back onto the teachers. Instead of having split class teaching as planned, teachers had to go back to whole class teaching and **readjust the teaching approach.** At times, the officer also went into the classroom to do co-teaching or help out.

All in all, **flexibility, teachers' cooperation** and **support for each other**, as well as their **engagement in an on-going evaluation process**, were the keys for overcoming all the difficulties faced.

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