

A background image showing a group of students in a classroom. In the foreground, a young boy with glasses is smiling and raising his hand. Other students are visible in the background, some looking towards the camera and others looking down at their work.

## Improving reading through explicit teaching of basic sight words

### Background

Recently, there has been a strong emphasis placed on reading in the curriculum reform. Reading to Learn is one of the key tasks in helping students become independent learners. Because words are the building blocks for reading comprehension, a large vocabulary opens students up to a wider range of reading materials. To read fluently with understanding, readers need to recognise about 95 percent of the words in a text (Adams, 1990).

Students who know words by sight are able to read them aloud automatically. The ability to recognise a large number of words instantly and automatically enables students to read fluently and to focus their attention on making sense of the passage improving their comprehension and understanding. This is especially the case for early readers. Readers have a limited amount of attention available while reading (Adams, 1990; Samuels, 2004; Stanovich, 1980). As they need to focus much of their attention on word recognition, little attention is left for comprehension. One hundred words account for almost half of all the words we read and write (Fry, Fountoukidis, & Polk, 1985). The ten words - **the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that** and **it** account for about 25 percent of all the words in school texts. Therefore high frequency words are a vital part of students' sight vocabulary. However, many students, especially struggling readers, have difficulties in recognising basic sight words because these words tend to be abstract words. Also many of the high frequency words share the same letters, for example, on/no, was/saw and of/for. Students often confuse these words. Explicit teaching and many repetitions of the basic sight words may be necessary for them to become part of students' sight vocabulary in order to enhance their reading fluency and comprehension.

Although the basic sight words occur frequently in texts, some students cannot recognise them automatically and accurately. Moreover, some teachers tend to think it more worthwhile to teach content words and so they spend more time teaching them. They assume that students know the basic sight words well due to their frequent occurrence in texts. Students need to acquire good vocabulary so that they can read. Teachers from Cheung Chau Sacred Heart School and HKFEW Wong Cho Bau School wanted to enhance students' reading ability by enlarging their vocabulary. High frequency words were taught with the aim of making these words sight vocabulary so as to enable students to read fluently with comprehension and meaning.

Reading fluency and reading comprehension are highly correlated. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency is reading text with **speed, accuracy,** and **expression.** In this study, we focussed only on accuracy and automaticity in reading, whereas prosody, which is also an important component in reading fluency, was not included. To further develop students' reading fluency, teachers may provide more opportunities for students to read aloud. Examples include repeated reading practice, paired reading and rereading, reader's theatre and choral reading.

### Levels

P3-4

## Strategies used

### Teaching Dolch word list

Based on children's books of his time, Edward William Dolch, PhD compiled a list which contains 220 "service words" (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and verbs) that have to be recognised by sight in order to achieve reading fluency. The list indicated the words which were the most frequently found on these levels: pre-primer, primer, first grade, second grade and third grade. It is estimated that the list contains 60-85 percent of the words in children's early books.

Dolch Primer Sight Vocabulary

41. all	59. into	77. that
42. am	60. like	78. there
43. are	61. must	79. they
44. at	62. new	80. this
45. ate	63. no	81. too
46. be	64. now	82. under
47. black	65. on	83. want
48. brown	66. our	84. was
49. but	67. out	85. well
50. came	68. please	86. went
51. did	69. pretty	87. what
52. do	70. ran	88. white
53. eat	71. ride	89. who
54. four	72. saw	90. will
55. get	73. say	91. with
56. good	74. she	92. yes
57. have	75. so	
58. he	76. soon	

### Revising the words constantly

Repetition is a useful strategy for learning a word. Therefore, each of the words on the Dolch Word List was introduced a few times in a week.

### Learning independently outside the classroom

A booklet with the Dolch Word List and sentences with the target words was provided to students to assist them to learn independently after class. Students were encouraged to make or to look for sentences with the Dolch words that they had learned from reading materials such as textbooks or readers they had encountered.

### Assessment for learning

Peer assessment and teacher assessment were carried out regularly. Peer assessment helped promote peer learning and independent learning. It gave students an opportunity to read aloud the words in front of their partners and listen to the sight words as student assessors. The awareness of the letter-sound relationship was then heightened.

The peer assessment itself provided a ground for spontaneous discussions on the pronunciation of words among students. In addition, through peer assessment, intrinsic learning motivation and ownership of learning were enhanced since individual students were able to trace their own learning progress. In the teacher assessment, students had to identify the sight words the teachers read. It could supplement and triangulate the student learning data. By doing the two types of assessment with different formats, two sets of data about student learning could be collected. Teachers were able to triangulate the analysis results in order to get a fuller picture of student learning for the follow up work.

## What happened

School:  
Cheung Chau Sacred Heart School (CCSH)  
Level: P3

School:  
HKFEW Wong Cho Bau School (WCB)  
Level: P4

When	What happened
November 2007	<p><u>Finding out students' knowledge about basic sight words:</u></p> <p>A pre-test was administered to find out the students' knowledge about basic sight words. Eighteen students from Cheung Chau Sacred Heart School (CCSH) and ten students from HKFEW Wong Cho Bau School (WCB) were chosen to take the test respectively. In the test, the students were asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• read aloud the words in the Dolch Word List in order to find out how well they knew the basic sight words;</li> <li>• read a passage with all the words in the Dolch Word List for 2 minutes in order to check their reading fluency;</li> <li>• answer 10 questions of different levels after reading a story with all the words in the Dolch Word List to check their reading ability.</li> </ul> <p>In the test, it was found that the students from both schools could not recognise about 40% of the Dolch words. The teachers found that there was a need to teach the basic sight words in order to improve students' reading ability.</p>
February 2008- May 2008	<p><u>Teaching the Dolch Word List</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers agreed to teach the pre-primer, primer and the 1<sup>st</sup> level of the Dolch Word List in a systematic manner. A sight word teaching kit which consisted of a full set of the Dolch Word List, PowerPoint and flashcards, a suggested teaching schedule, peer assessment papers and teacher assessment papers were provided.</li> </ul> <p>According to the suggested teaching schedule, teachers would need about nine weeks to finish the teaching of the three lists. Teachers followed the agreed teaching schedule. They taught about seven to eight new sight words to students each day using PowerPoint or flash cards with the target words. As well as showing the words in isolation, example sentences with the sight words were shown to create a context for students to associate meaning with the words.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div data-bbox="496 1736 810 1951" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="810 1736 1117 1951" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1117 1736 1433 1951" data-label="Image"> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div data-bbox="507 1966 794 2022" data-label="Caption"> <p>Teacher uses PowerPoint to teach basic sight words</p> </div> <div data-bbox="831 1966 1107 2022" data-label="Caption"> <p>A PowerPoint slide for teaching basic sight words</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1150 1966 1422 2022" data-label="Caption"> <p>Student reading aloud the basic sight words</p> </div> </div>

### Revising the words constantly

- Before teaching new sight words, the words that were learned the day before were revised. Teachers revised the words with the students by either showing the PowerPoint or the flash cards. Students read aloud the words shown.

### Learning independently outside the classroom

- Students were given a sight word booklet to assist after-class individual study. The booklet comprised the word lists taught and example sentences which were made up with each sight words. Students were encouraged to make sentences with the sight words that they learned in class. The more capable students were asked to produce sentences with the sight words, while for the less capable, copying from the reading materials that they encountered was acceptable.

Dolch Pre-Primer Sight Vocabulary		
1. a	15. I	29. run
2. and	16. in	30. said
3. away	17. is	31. see
4. big	18. it	32. the
5. blue	19. jump	33. three
6. can	20. little	34. to
7. come	21. look	35. two
8. down	22. make	36. up
9. find	23. me	37. we
10. for	24. my	38. where
11. funny	25. not	39. yellow
12. go	26. one	40. you
13. help	27. play	
14. here	28. red	

Dolch Word List in the sight word booklet

29 run	I can run.	
30 said	The dog can bark. He said hello.	
31 see	She said good morning. I see a dog.	
32 the	I see a cat. I like the book.	
33 three	I like the car. I have three pencils.	
34 to	I have three oranges. I go to school. I got a bed.	

Students made sentences with the target sight words in the sight word booklet.

### Assessment for learning

Peer assessment and teacher assessment were carried out regularly. The table below summarises the functions of the peer and teacher assessment.

Peer assessment	Teacher assessment
Assessment focus: Word recognition	
Perceive: form	Perceive: sound
Produce: sound	Produce: form
Objectives of the assessments: To assess as well as to provide an opportunity for peer learning	Objectives of the assessments: To gather information about student learning. Data collected could be used to triangulate with the data got from the peer assessment to inform further learning and teaching.

- Peer assessment

Peer assessment was done in pairs once a week. In CCSH, it was done in class whereas in WCB, it was done at recess or in tutorial lessons. Each word was assessed 1-3 times throughout the learning process before the teacher assessment took place. The student assessors put a tick or a cross on the peer assessment checklist as they listened to all the sight words pronounced by their partners.

Dolch Sight Words Reading Assessment: List 2 (Primer)											
Student Name: _____						Partner's name: _____					
Assessment Dates: 1 <sup>st</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>							
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	into	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	that
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	there
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	are	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	must	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	they
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	new	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	this
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	too
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	now	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	under

peer assessment



Students from CCSH doing peer assessment in class



Students from WCB doing peer assessment in a tutorial lesson

- Teacher assessment

Teacher assessment was done after the teaching of each list. There were three options given for each word pronounced by the teacher. The teachers read aloud the words once. Students were required to listen to the teacher and tick the correct boxes as they identified the words.

Dolch Sight Words List 1 (Pre-primer) Teacher Assessment										Teacher's Copy	
Student Name: _____				Class: _____		Date: _____					
Listen to the teacher. The teacher will read the words <b>ONCE</b> only. Tick the correct boxes.											
Teacher says:											
1. can	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	16. come	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	17. if	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>
2. and	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	17. if	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	18. jump	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>
3. away	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	18. jump	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	19. in	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>
4. a	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	19. in	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	20. where	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>
5. big	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	20. where	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	21. little	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>
6. down	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>	21. little	a. <input type="checkbox"/>	b. <input type="checkbox"/>	c. <input type="checkbox"/>				

teacher assessment



Students doing teacher assessment after learning a word list



The teacher assessment paper

June 2008

Finding out the impact of the explicit teaching of basic sight words

A post-test was administered to find out the impact of the explicit teaching of basic sight words. The same group of students were asked to do a post-test identical to the pre-test.



Student reading aloud the words on the Dolch Word List and a passage

## Impact

### Students' knowledge on basic sight words

- The students from both schools could **recognise more sight words** in the post test. Of the 133 words, students from both schools showed about 45% improvement in the post test.
- It is worth noting that students were more familiar with the words which appear frequently at lower levels at the beginning. Towards the end of the learning process, they learned more words that occur frequently at higher levels than the ones that occur frequently at lower levels (see Diagrams 1 and 2). The result indicated that the learning of words in the higher level lists did not take place as naturally as teachers thought it would. There needed to be explicit teaching to facilitate effective learning.

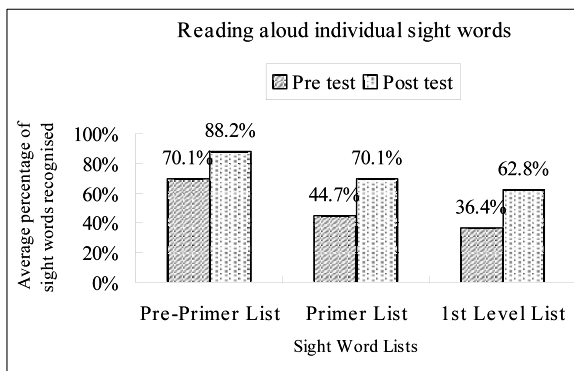


Diagram 1: The words in the Dolch Word List (pre-primer, primer and 1st level lists) that the students from CCSH read aloud accurately

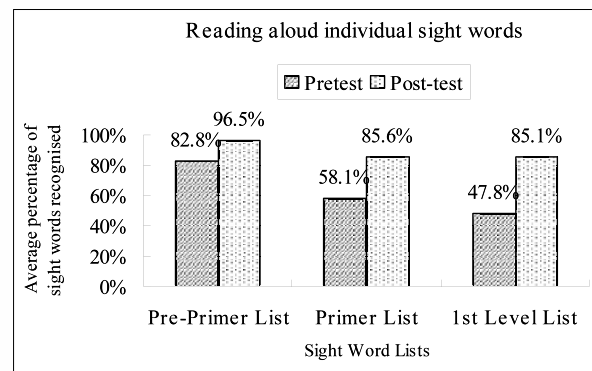


Diagram 2: The words in the Dolch Word List (pre-primer, primer and 1st level lists) that the students from WCB read aloud accurately

### Students' reading fluency

- The students were asked to read aloud a passage in two minutes. All students were able to read more words accurately within the time limit. Nearly 40 % of the students showed an improvement of more than 100 % in regard to the number of words that they could read aloud accurately in the post test. The highest improvement rate of individuals even reached 310 %.
- The results indicated that students' reading fluency in terms of accuracy and automaticity improved as a result of the explicit teaching of sight words. More high frequency words had become sight vocabulary.

### Students' reading comprehension

More than 55 % of the students from both schools achieved higher scores in the comprehension test in the post test.

### Teachers' awareness of vocabulary teaching

Teachers were more aware of the importance of teaching sight words as a part of vocabulary teaching. Through the project, they realised that many students could not recognise high frequency words by sight. Explicit teaching of these words was necessary to enhance students' reading skills.



## Facilitating factors

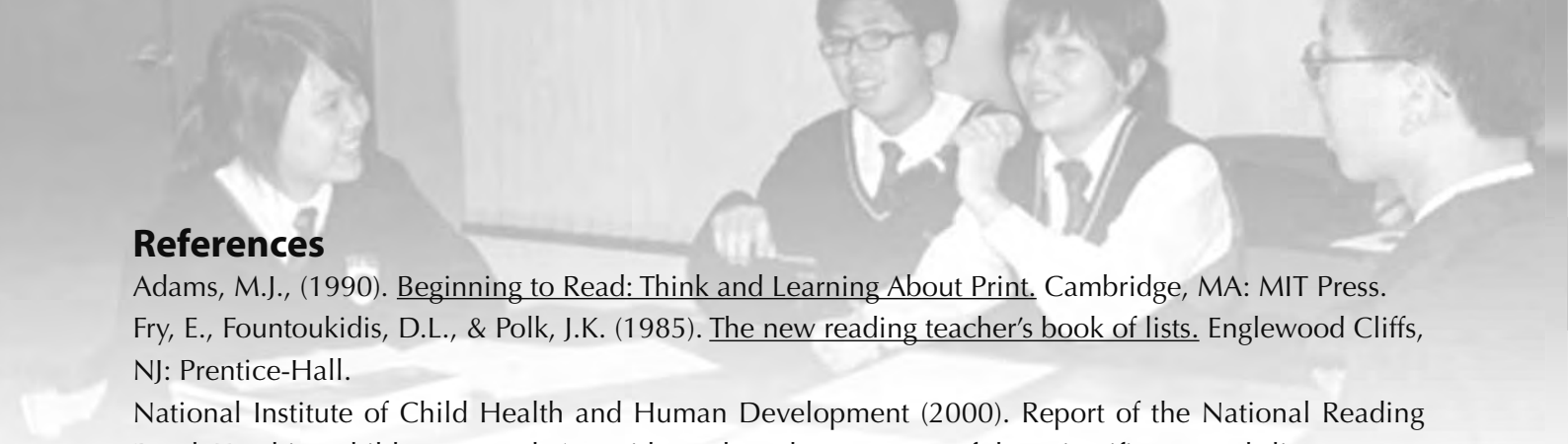
- The Language Support Officers carried out a pre-test with students before the implementation of the project. The test results provided useful information to teachers. They realised that students could not recognise many high frequency words and therefore saw the urgent need to make these words sight vocabulary.
- Teachers found that the teaching materials were compact and user-friendly. The ready-made materials saved teachers much preparation time.
- Teachers in these two schools were very proactive. Some teachers teaching other levels found the set of teaching materials useful and initiated the teaching of sight words in their own classes.

## Difficulties and suggestions

- Teachers might not find it economical to use the PowerPoint slides as teaching aids; flash cards could be used instead. Teachers could also consider putting up all the sight words on the walls in the classroom. It would be more convenient for teaching. It would also help create a language-rich environment for students.
- Some teachers reflected that the teaching schedule was very tight though it took about 5 minutes a day to go through the sight words. Teachers could consider writing up a school-based scheme of work for the teaching of basic sight words throughout the Key Stages. For example, they may introduce to students the basic sight words earlier in lower levels, and teach 1 to 2 lists instead of 3 in a year. In this way, teachers could have better planning and management of the teaching process.

## Way forward

- Teacher will continue the teaching of sight words by teaching the 2<sup>nd</sup> level and 3<sup>rd</sup> level word lists next year.
- Teachers could continue the teaching of sight words and develop more interesting ways to teach them to maximise the learning outcomes.
- Teachers may design a teaching scheme of work to tell which word lists we should at least cover/reinforce at which level to realise vertical curriculum planning with regard to the teaching of sight words.
- Assignments of various kinds (e.g. words games, reading and listening tasks) should be designed to tell students clearly about their achievements. This is a very cost-effective way to improve their learning by first boosting students' learning incentive with achievements that they could observe.
- Teachers could provide more opportunities for students to read aloud. For example, modelled reading, reader's theatre or radio drama could be done to further develop students' reading fluency.



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**Cheung Chau Sacred Heart School**  
**Joanne NG (Language Support Officer)**  
**Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers Wong Cho Bau School**  
**Connie LAM (Language Support Officer)**



## Using drama to increase learning motivation and cater for learner diversity

### Background

Students learn best when they have the incentive and motivation for learning. Whitear (1998) claims that drama “is a refreshing and energising approach to language learning for both students and teachers” (p.36). Both Chauhan (2004) and Mordecai (1985) concur that drama provides a real context for using the language for communication which stimulates motivation. Likewise, Stern (1980) believes that drama heightens students’ self-esteem and lowers their rejection in second language learning. Wan Yee Sam (1990) adds that drama helps minimise the problem of mixed ability. More able students can engage in roles requiring more oral communication whereas less able students can be involved more in paralinguistic communication i.e. body language. In short, drama provides an optimal climate for language learning.

In view of this, drama seems to be a useful means to encourage students of Tsuen Wan Chiu Chow Public School (TWCC) to learn English. The students are from various cultural and sociological backgrounds, including new arrivals from the mainland and non Chinese-speaking (NCS) children. Many of them have little motivation to learn English. Their great differences in English competence and learning styles make teaching a demanding job. Coincidentally, drama was a new genre to be introduced in the P4 GE programme. Realising the benefits of drama in language learning, teachers thought they could take this opportunity to infuse drama into the reading lessons to enhance students’ learning motivation as well as cater for learning diversity. At the same time, drama would also serve other purposes such as creating a platform for students to practise their speaking skills, expanding their vocabulary, developing their writing skills, and aligning classroom teaching with school event.

### Level

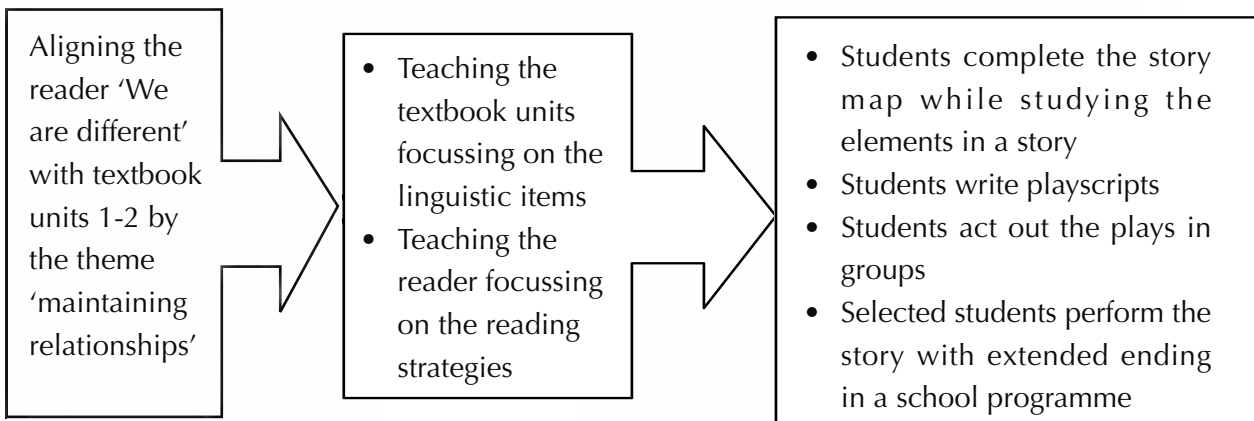
P4

### Strategies used

Strategy used	Rationale for using the strategy
Engaging students in group work	➤ To create opportunities for students to help and give peer support to one another
Providing graded worksheets	➤ To provide manageable tasks for less able students ➤ To give room for creativity for more able students
Integrating the reader into the textbook units	➤ To establish a meaningful and purposeful context for students to apply the language items learned in the textbook units ➤ To provide language input for writing a playscript
Infusing vocabulary building skills into the lessons	➤ To help students expand their vocabulary and thus their language skills

Engaging all students in drama performances by acting out the story in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To reinforce students' active participation and ownership of learning</li> <li>➤ To make students feel comfortable as no one student is spotlighted more than another</li> <li>➤ To enhance oral communication skills in a supportive environment</li> </ul>
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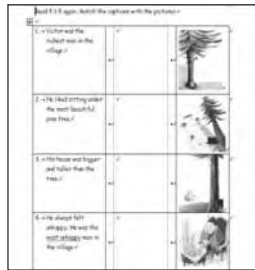
## What happened



Objective	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strengthen book concept</li> <li>➤ Help students make predictions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pre-reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students were guided to draw factual information from the book cover to reinforce their knowledge of book concept e.g. publisher.</li> <li>➤ Teacher introduced the story by relating it to students' personal experience that everyone is unique.</li> <li>➤ 'Wh-' questions were used to help students predict the story content e.g. Who is the main character? How did he feel?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teach reading strategies e.g. scanning, skimming, inferring</li> <li>➤ Help students revisit and practise language items covered in the textbook units i.e. comparatives and superlatives</li> </ul>	<p><b>While-reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers guided students to read the story and used questions to check their understanding.</li> <li>➤ To help less able students comprehend the story, the first few pages were read sentence by sentence from which focussed questions were asked in order to help them develop targeted reading strategies. For examples, questions were asked to help students scan for specific information:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When did this story happen?</li> <li>• What is his name?</li> <li>• Read and find words describing Victor.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ The whole paragraph was presented to more able students to guide them to read between lines while practising reading strategies.</li> </ul>



- Graded worksheets were given to students for practice and consolidation. For instance, less able students matched captions with pictures whereas more able students wrote the captions themselves.



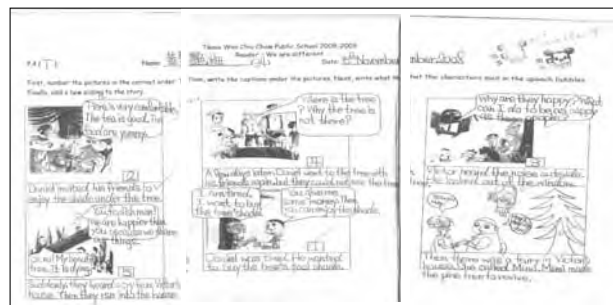
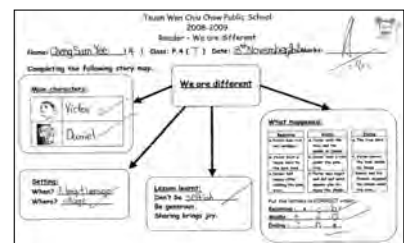
- Students were constantly exposed to the target language items (i.e. comparatives and superlatives) when doing the worksheets e.g. matching and filling in the blanks. They applied the language items when answering questions about the story.
- Vocabulary building skills were infused into the lessons by drawing students' attention to adjectives describing people. To make the tasks more manageable for less able students, hints like page numbers and initial letters were given.



- Teach elements in a narrative
- Introduce features in a play
- Help students construct a playscript

**Post-reading**

- Students were guided to complete a story map through which elements in a narrative were analysed and taught i.e. characters, setting, problems, solutions, ending and the moral.
- Fundamental components of a drama were introduced. Students were guided to identify roles, dialogues, narration and stage directions from the story.
- Students wrote playscripts. Less able students were guided to recount the story in four acts whereas more able students needed to construct five acts and an extended ending.



- Selected students performed the play in a school programme for P3 and P4 students.



## Impact on students

### Positive attitude towards reading

Students felt the story was more interesting than those they had read before. Teachers also felt that most students loved the book. Students were very serious about the final performance. The performers said the lines very clearly and maintained eye contact with the audience. As they were familiar with the story, the student audience enjoyed the performance very much. While watching the show, a P4 girl could not help telling her classmates she liked it a lot.

### Better language skills

Most students, including less able students became familiar with story elements which helped generate and connect ideas in their writing. They demonstrated improvements in their scanning, referencing and predicting skills, so their reading comprehension became better. This was reflected by their higher involvement in the lessons. The in-class performances provided a genuine need for oral communication. They had greater confidence in speaking and showed improvement in pronunciation.

## Impact on teachers

### Adopting an integrative approach to lesson design

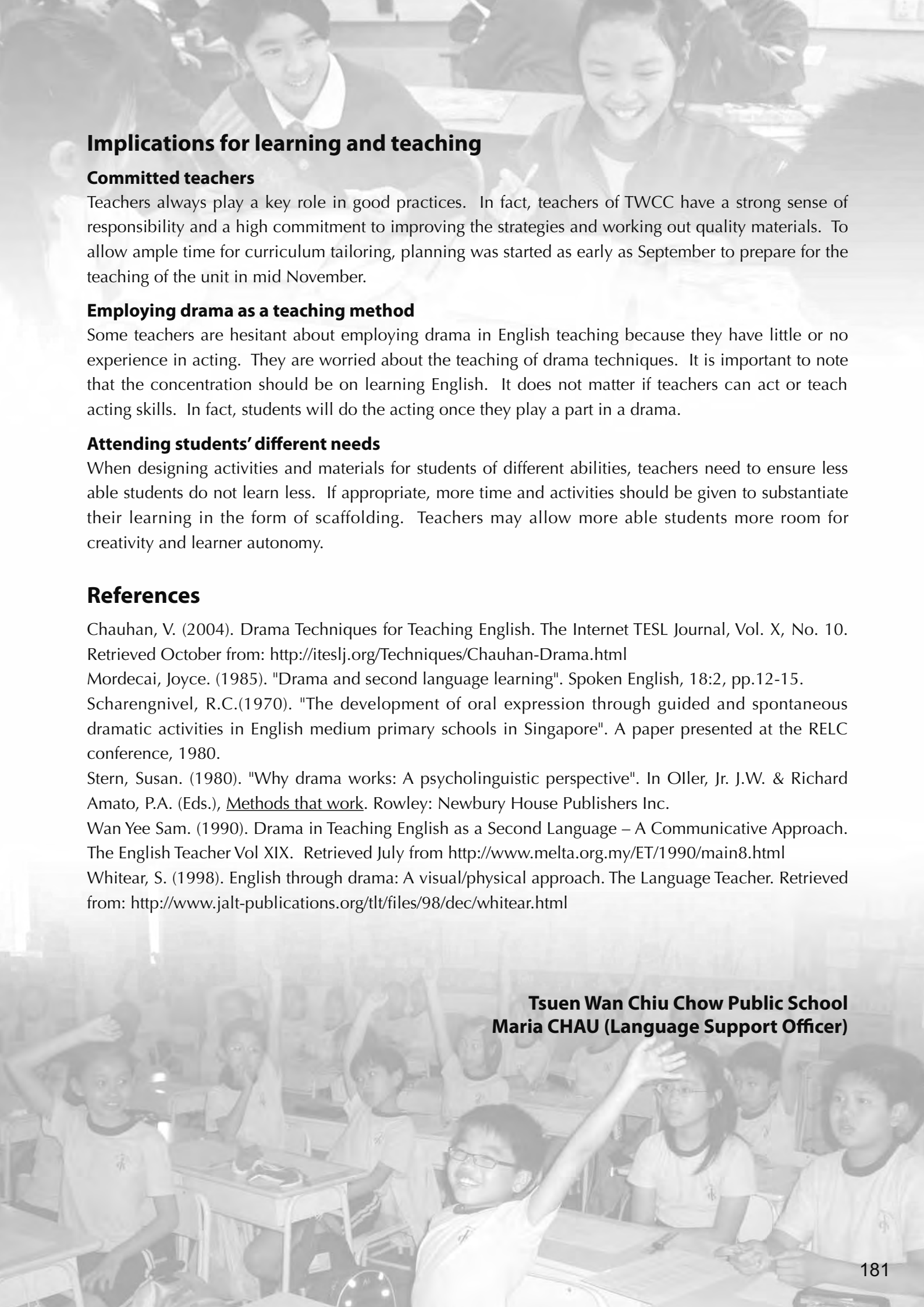
Teachers have become more familiar with writing their school-based reading curriculum. They know how to set clear objectives, identify main teaching points and infuse them into the reading lessons. In this case, they learned how to use drama to provide a platform for consolidating the teaching points. This helped students revisit and apply the vocabulary and language structures learned in a meaningful and purposeful way.

### Linking the formal and informal curricula

Seeing the positive response from the student audience who were highly involved, teachers realised the benefit of linking classroom learning with activities beyond the classroom. One teacher felt they should consider adopting this approach in future school programmes.

### Catering for learner diversity

Teachers are more confident in dealing with the issue of individual differences. They knew how to design and what to include in varied materials for students of different abilities.



## Implications for learning and teaching

### Committed teachers

Teachers always play a key role in good practices. In fact, teachers of TWCC have a strong sense of responsibility and a high commitment to improving the strategies and working out quality materials. To allow ample time for curriculum tailoring, planning was started as early as September to prepare for the teaching of the unit in mid November.

### Employing drama as a teaching method

Some teachers are hesitant about employing drama in English teaching because they have little or no experience in acting. They are worried about the teaching of drama techniques. It is important to note that the concentration should be on learning English. It does not matter if teachers can act or teach acting skills. In fact, students will do the acting once they play a part in a drama.

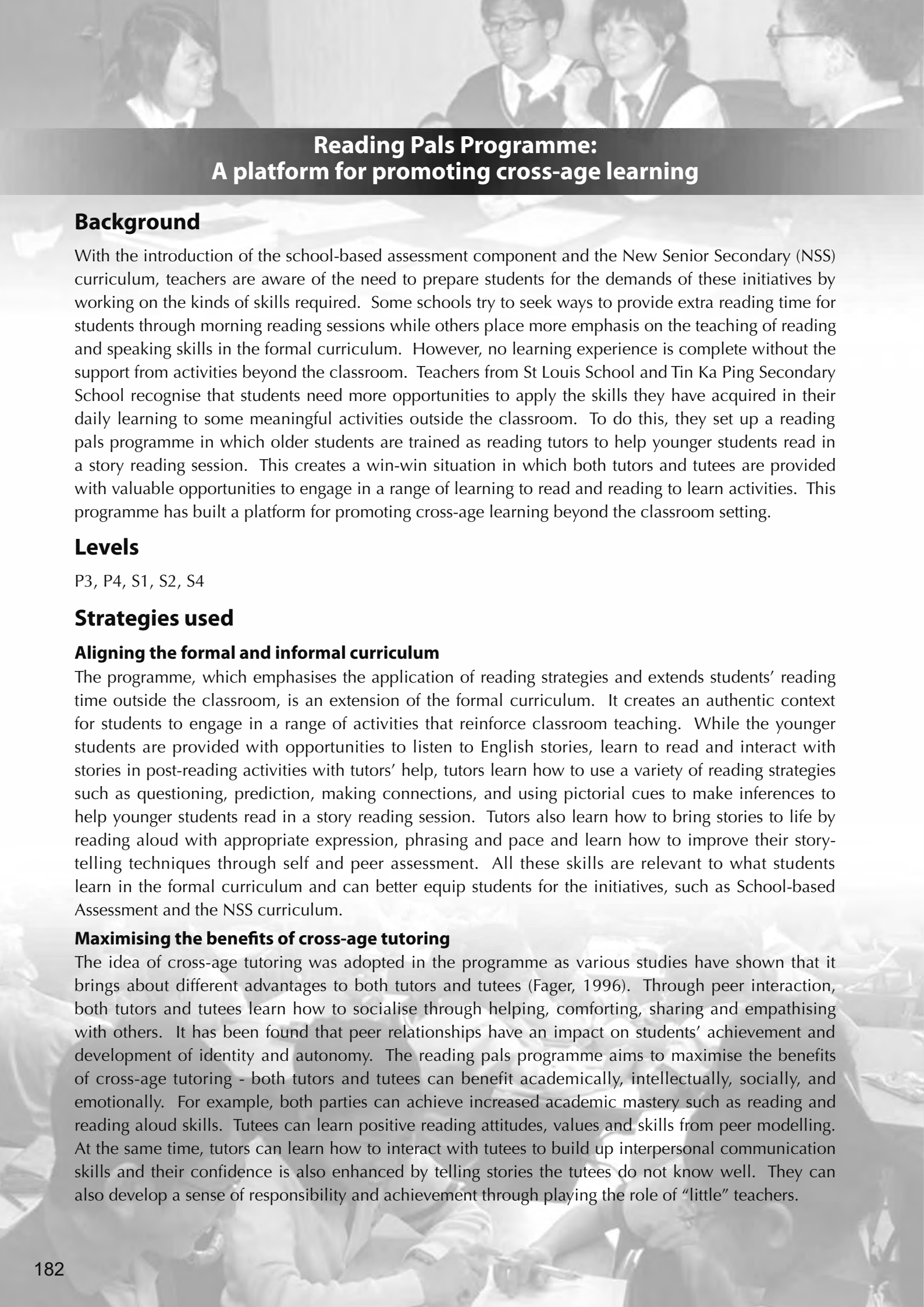
### Attending students' different needs

When designing activities and materials for students of different abilities, teachers need to ensure less able students do not learn less. If appropriate, more time and activities should be given to substantiate their learning in the form of scaffolding. Teachers may allow more able students more room for creativity and learner autonomy.

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**Tsuen Wan Chiu Chow Public School**  
**Maria CHAU (Language Support Officer)**



## Reading Pals Programme: A platform for promoting cross-age learning

### Background

With the introduction of the school-based assessment component and the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum, teachers are aware of the need to prepare students for the demands of these initiatives by working on the kinds of skills required. Some schools try to seek ways to provide extra reading time for students through morning reading sessions while others place more emphasis on the teaching of reading and speaking skills in the formal curriculum. However, no learning experience is complete without the support from activities beyond the classroom. Teachers from St Louis School and Tin Ka Ping Secondary School recognise that students need more opportunities to apply the skills they have acquired in their daily learning to some meaningful activities outside the classroom. To do this, they set up a reading pals programme in which older students are trained as reading tutors to help younger students read in a story reading session. This creates a win-win situation in which both tutors and tutees are provided with valuable opportunities to engage in a range of learning to read and reading to learn activities. This programme has built a platform for promoting cross-age learning beyond the classroom setting.

### Levels

P3, P4, S1, S2, S4

### Strategies used

#### Aligning the formal and informal curriculum

The programme, which emphasises the application of reading strategies and extends students' reading time outside the classroom, is an extension of the formal curriculum. It creates an authentic context for students to engage in a range of activities that reinforce classroom teaching. While the younger students are provided with opportunities to listen to English stories, learn to read and interact with stories in post-reading activities with tutors' help, tutors learn how to use a variety of reading strategies such as questioning, prediction, making connections, and using pictorial cues to make inferences to help younger students read in a story reading session. Tutors also learn how to bring stories to life by reading aloud with appropriate expression, phrasing and pace and learn how to improve their story-telling techniques through self and peer assessment. All these skills are relevant to what students learn in the formal curriculum and can better equip students for the initiatives, such as School-based Assessment and the NSS curriculum.

#### Maximising the benefits of cross-age tutoring

The idea of cross-age tutoring was adopted in the programme as various studies have shown that it brings about different advantages to both tutors and tutees (Fager, 1996). Through peer interaction, both tutors and tutees learn how to socialise through helping, comforting, sharing and empathising with others. It has been found that peer relationships have an impact on students' achievement and development of identity and autonomy. The reading pals programme aims to maximise the benefits of cross-age tutoring - both tutors and tutees can benefit academically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. For example, both parties can achieve increased academic mastery such as reading and reading aloud skills. Tutees can learn positive reading attitudes, values and skills from peer modelling. At the same time, tutors can learn how to interact with tutees to build up interpersonal communication skills and their confidence is also enhanced by telling stories the tutees do not know well. They can also develop a sense of responsibility and achievement through playing the role of "little" teachers.

## Capacity building for teachers

Before planning and implementing the reading pals programme with schools, teachers interested in the programme were invited to attend a briefing session in which information such as the programme objectives, details about how to set up a cross-age reading programme and the training and learning package was shared. Teachers obtained concrete ideas on what the reading pals programme is and whether it would fit into the school context. Teachers also gained ideas on how to conduct training sessions for tutors on their own. The briefing session paved the way for the planning and implementation of the programme in schools.

## Utilising the training CD-ROM

Apart from having the support from the Language Support Officers in planning the programme and conducting training sessions for tutors, schools were given a training CD-ROM which was developed with the aim of helping teachers set up their own buddy reading programme in school. Teachers can find training videos, lesson plans and teaching materials for conducting training sessions in the CD-ROM. There are also booklets, learning materials for tutees and tutors, evaluation tools, letters to parents and certificates for tutors. The CD-ROM not only saves teachers' time from developing everything from scratch, but also shows them a possible way to start off the programme.

## What happened

The two schools implemented a different form of reading pals programme. In St Louis School, the reading pals programme was a cross-school collaboration involving both the primary and secondary sectors, while in the case of Tin Ka Ping Secondary School, the cross-age tutoring involved the senior and junior students within the school. Despite this, both schools went through the same process of setting up their cross-age reading programme:

### Stage 1: Planning

#### Briefing session for teachers

Teachers attended the briefing session and obtained ideas such as how to setup the programme, how to train tutors and how to use the training package.



Teachers attending a briefing session

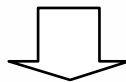


#### Planning for the reading pals programme

Language Support Officers discussed with teachers the preparation work to be done in detail: the learning goals and objectives of the programme, the format of the programme, the tutors and tutees to be involved, the number of training sessions, the training materials to be used, the evaluation tools to be used, etc. A different form of reading pals programme with a specific programme objective was designed as on the next page:

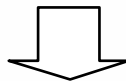


St Louis School	Tin Ka Ping Secondary School
<p>The main objective of the programme was set to create opportunities for students to practise reading strategies. S2 students were chosen as potential tutors because they had already acquired some basic knowledge of reading strategies in S1. Teachers decided to collaborate with St Charles School which is located in a neighbouring district. It has had some experience in organising buddy reading programmes and the two English panel heads are very enthusiastic about promoting reading outside the classroom. They hoped the programme would help their students develop a love for reading and gain more positive experiences through reading.</p>	<p>The programme aimed to provide a platform for S1 and S4 students to benefit from reading. The S1 students chosen were relatively weak in English but were willing to learn. When guiding them to read, their S4 tutors would show them the various reading strategies and help them respond to the texts with post-reading activities. This would enhance their four language skills with the help of their peers.</p> <p>The programme also aimed to create a chance for S4 students to apply their speaking and presentation skills, which are essential for School-based Assessment in the English curriculum. They would also learn how to develop interpersonal skills with junior form students in junior forms.</p>



### Recruitment of tutors and tutees

Teachers recruited suitable tutors and tutees with the programme objectives in mind. It was agreed that English ability was not the most important criterion for selecting tutors and tutees. It was decided that students who interact well and would not create discipline problems would be chosen as tutors and tutees.





### Stage 2: Training for tutors

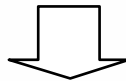
Tutors from both schools received the following training prior to the actual reading sessions:

Session	Focus
1	<p><b>Setting purpose and confidence building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how the programme operates</li> <li>• how to build up a good relationship with tutees</li> <li>• the roles and responsibilities as tutors</li> <li>• confidence building</li> <li>• setting learning goals</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="1062 1559 1358 1760" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="1091 1767 1345 1794">Teachers' demonstration</p>
2	<p><b>Conducting a picture walk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the what, when, and how of conducting a picture walk</li> <li>• using a picture walk to make predictions, make connections, activate prior knowledge, etc.</li> </ul>



3	<p><b>Using pictorial cues and questioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to use picture cues in reading</li> <li>• how to ask questions with good picture cues</li> <li>• tips in setting good questions</li> <li>• how to modify questions based on tutees' response</li> </ul>	 <p>Teacher's modelling</p>
4	<p><b>Reading aloud skills for effective and interesting delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading with appropriate expression, phrasing and pace</li> <li>• the use of intonation</li> <li>• voice projection</li> </ul>	 <p>Tutors doing a speaking activity</p>
5	<p><b>Dealing with unexpected scenarios and doing post-reading activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to handle difficult situations</li> <li>• activities in the post-reading stage</li> </ul>	

Some meetings for practice and sharing were held prior to the reading sessions. In these meetings, the tutors paired up and rehearsed the tutoring process. They took turns to play the roles of the tutor and tutee. After the practice, they were able to share their difficulties and suggest ways for improvements for each other as they had put themselves into the shoes of the tutees. The teacher could also identify the problems of the student tutors and provided guidance. To prepare them for reading story books to tutees, the teachers in charge of the programme gave the tutors individual help on pronouncing unknown words in the story books.



### Stage 3: Implementation

St Louis School and St Charles School	Tin Ka Ping Secondary School
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers and tutors went to the primary school to conduct reading sessions with the tutees after school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-story telling: teachers, tutors and tutees played some simple warm-up games</li> <li>• Story telling: tutors read stories to the tutees demonstrating reading strategies like doing a picture walk</li> <li>• Post-story telling: tutors guided the tutees to learn new words and do some simple post-reading activities such as designing bookmarks</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. A tutor was paired up with two to three tutees from P3 or P4.</li> <li>3. Each session lasted for 45 minutes to 1 hour.</li> <li>4. Each tutee would read one story in each session.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers, tutors and tutees met after school for the reading sessions.</li> <li>2. Tutors paired up and read stories to the tutees. The tutors introduced and demonstrated various reading strategies to their tutees, like making predictions, making connections, using contextual clues, etc.</li> <li>3. The story telling process lasted for 30 minutes.</li> <li>4. A 15-minute debriefing session was then followed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutors shared their experiences, difficulties and tips in the tutoring process.</li> <li>• Teachers commented on the tutors' performances and suggested ways for improvements.</li> <li>• It is a platform for participants to show appreciation and encouragement to each other.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>



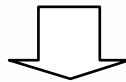
Tutors discussing ways for improvements



Tutors doing a rehearsal



Tutors reading to tutees in a reading session



### Stage 4: Evaluation

In order to collect the participants' opinions to evaluate and refine the programmes, both tutors and tutees were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Some of them were interviewed to obtain more qualitative information.

St Louis School and St Charles School	Tin Ka Ping Secondary School
<p>The tutors felt that the second and third reading sessions ran more smoothly as they had gained some experiences in the first reading session. They were able to think of some ways to make the tutees more responsive and the reading sessions more interactive. The teachers were pleased with their active participation.</p>	<p>Students' immediate feedback in the debriefing sessions was generally very positive. They found that the process ran more smoothly in the second tutoring session because the tutees were more responsive and more importantly, they had mastered some story-telling as well as tutoring skills in English. The teachers were also satisfied with the outcome.</p>

### Impact on tutors

#### Development of reading strategies and other language skills

The tutors shared that they had learned various reading strategies such as guessing word meanings from context and using pictorial cues from the programme. The S2 tutors found those reading strategies particularly useful and they could apply them in their formal lessons and in their own reading. The tutors also shared that they had improved their speaking skills as well and learned how to read with intonation when reading drama scripts in drama lessons and when doing story-telling activities.

#### Development of generic skills and whole person development

The tutors felt that they had developed interpersonal communication skills through interacting with and teaching tutees younger than them. They also developed a sense of responsibility through playing the role of a teacher. Apart from these, they felt they had increased confidence in reading aloud and speaking in front of people. One of the tutors said he had developed a stronger sense of audience and he realised the importance of presentation skills when doing a presentation or a speaking activity. Teachers thought these skills could help students do better in the School-based Assessment.

## **Gaining positive learning experiences**

According to the questionnaire and interview data, all the tutors enjoyed taking part in the programme. They found the programme very meaningful as they could help others by reading books to them. They agreed that both tutors and tutees were able to improve English and learn from reading through the programme. They were very positive toward this experience and they indicated they would take part in the programme again.

## **Impact on tutees**

### **Developing a love for reading**

In the questionnaires and the interviews, all the tutees indicated that they enjoyed reading with the tutors and they thought they had learned more about how to read. The responses from the primary school tutees were overwhelmingly positive. They said they could remember the stories that the tutors read with them, though the books were read once only. When asked if the programme had any impact on their reading, they felt that they had developed a love for reading and they were reading more books after joining the programme.

### **Positive experience in interacting with older counterparts**

In addition to having enjoyed listening to the story, the tutees are positive to the whole peer modelling process. The peer interaction is not limited to the story-telling process. As shared by one of the student tutors in the debriefing session, his tutee asked him questions about his school life and his personal life. Tutees can find in the tutors a friend who shares, helps and comforts.



Tutors and tutees sharing their opinions on the programme

## **Facilitating factors**

### **Setting up a school-based reading pals programme**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to setting up a reading programme in school and it is essential for schools to develop one that suits their students. The two schools were able to take into account their school contexts to come up with their programme goals when designing their own reading pals programmes. Therefore, the programmes could be implemented with a clear focus on the objectives and the tutors and tutees were able to benefit from the expected outcomes. The schools have demonstrated a good example of setting up a school-based reading programme.

### **Successful design of the programme**

The reading pals programme is able to “kill several birds with one stone”. It is a meaningful programme that benefits both tutors and tutees as they can learn different strategies and develop new skills. It also provides students with the opportunity to gain other learning experiences through service learning. What’s more, the programme aligns with the formal curriculum and reinforces classroom teaching. It assists teachers in helping students develop multiple skills like reading skills, reading aloud skills and speaking skills. It has indeed created a win-win situation for tutors and tutees, as well as students to teachers.



### **Selection of tutors and tutees**

The success of the programme is attributed to the criteria for selecting tutors and tutees. As forcing unwilling volunteers to join the programme might defeat the purpose of cross-age learning, the teachers only looked for tutors who wanted to serve others on a voluntary basis. Besides this, instead of focussing on students' standard of English, the teachers took into account the more important qualities that would make good tutors and tutees. With the clear selection criteria in mind, some suitable tutors and tutees were recruited, and a good group dynamic could be established in the reading sessions.

### **Involvement of supportive teachers**

The teachers in charge of the programmes are professional and committed. They set aside time for the training sessions and meetings with the Language Support Officers. They were also involved in training the tutors and monitoring the progress of the programme. The teachers from the collaborating school are also supportive and cooperative. They made good arrangements for the reading sessions at their school. Without the effort and dedication of all teachers, the programme would not have been a success.

## **Difficulties and suggestions**

### **Lack time for training and reading**

The biggest constraint is time for training and practices. The teacher in charge of the programme needs to plan ahead to decide how much time he or she can afford to train the tutors and whether there are other colleagues who can help out in the programme. It is a good idea to form a teacher team so that they can support each other and the workload can be shared.

### **Busy schedules of tutors**

Students are busy and they have other commitments with other teachers or have to take part in extra-curricular activities after school. To avoid overloading the tutors and to ensure a stable schedule of activities, a good suggestion is to organise the reading pals programme as a co-curricular activity so that the school can reserve time for the tutors' meetings after school.

### **Availability of suitable books for tutees**

Another difficulty is the lack of suitable books for the tutees. To resolve this problem, teachers need to target a certain group of tutees in advance and set aside money to buy books for them. They can also form a network with collaborating schools and share books among themselves.

## **Reference**

Fager, J. (1996). Tutoring: Strategies for successful learning. ERIC Reproduction Service No. ED431840.  
Chandler-Olcott, K and Hinchman, K. A. (2005). Tutoring Adolescent Literacy Learners: A Guide for Volunteers. New York: Guilford.

**Tin Ka Ping Secondary School**  
**Patricia PANG (Language Support Officer)**  
**St Louis School & St Charles School**  
**Ken CHIANG (Language Support Officer)**

A background image showing a group of students in a classroom setting, smiling and engaged in their work. The image is slightly faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

## From reading to developing an integrated school-based curriculum

### Background

To build on the experiences of developing teaching materials for their students, teachers at St Joan of Arc Secondary School wanted to move forward to develop a school-based curriculum which combines language skills. Emphasis would also be placed on horizontal coherence and progressive development of the curriculum.

With this challenging task ahead, different types of data were examined (e.g. External School Review report, recommendations by the English Enhancement Scheme (EES) interview panel, school Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) data, panel year-end evaluation documents, observations by school personnel and student questionnaires) which identified as focuses of development:

- developing curriculum leadership
- developing students' reading competency
- increasing teachers' knowledge of and strategies for teaching reading
- enriching the resource bank for the learning and teaching of reading

### Levels

S1-3

### Strategies used

1. Strategic deployment of teachers and effective use of resources
  - Core teachers are presented with opportunities to develop their curriculum leadership potential. They take a more active role in developing school-based materials, facilitating the implementation of the project and ensuring its sustainability.
  - Although the non-core teachers in the year levels have less involvement in the planning stage, they all use the strategies, materials and activities co-developed by the core teachers and the Language Support Officer (LSO) to teach their classes.
  - The project coordinator and some core teachers are deployed across the target levels to ensure vertical progression of the curriculum development focuses.
  - With extra teaching manpower funded by the EES, space is provided for core teachers to work towards the objectives.
2. Explicit teaching of reading strategies
  - Reading to learn lies at the heart of the curriculum reform. It can also be used to create links with other language skills (e.g. from reading to writing) for students to learn and practise them in an integrated manner.
  - Teachers have tended to treat TSA practice as a stand-alone item in S1-3. To ensure that the core curriculum gives students the necessary skills for the TSA, teachers teach reading strategies explicitly in the core curriculum.

# What happened

## Stage 1 (Sep. 07 – Jun. 08): S1

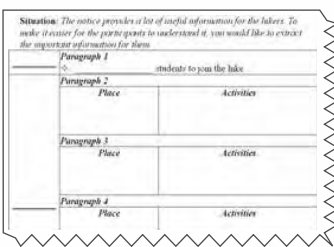
1. Textbook units were selected and adapted. Thematically aligned reading extension modules were developed to expose students to more text types.

Task in textbook:  
Students answer comprehension questions as discrete items.



Adapted task: Students write an email. To complete the text, they need to pay attention to text features and practise reading strategies like making inferences.

2. A task-based learning approach was adopted to provide a meaningful purpose for the learning tasks and to enable skills to be integrated.



Task: to promote a hike. Students read an information sheet about a hike, extract information and fill in a graphic organiser to understand the text structure of the information sheet.

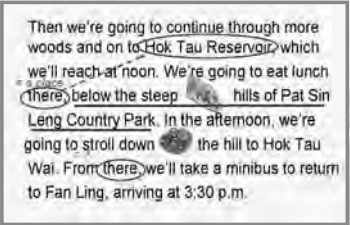


Begin each description with an imperative

Then, students practise visualising and write descriptions. Teachers use these to assess students' understanding of the text and knowledge of grammar.

3. **Explicit teaching** of reading strategies was built into the curriculum. These included: making predictions, visualising, guessing word meanings, making inferences, understanding text-structure, making text-to-self connections, etc. Students learned to apply them in the three phases of reading (pre-, while- and post-reading phases). The following instructional approaches to teaching reading strategies were adopted:

- lifting text and coding
- reading aloud
- reasoning through text (engaging students in oral responses)
- rereading for deeper meaning (multiple readings of text)
- thinking aloud
- repeated practice (planning in practice opportunities in each unit of work)



Teachers think aloud to demonstrate target reading strategies with the aid of powerpoint slides.

4. **Sustainability** and transference of skills and knowledge to other teachers was ensured by making sure that all teachers were clear about the rationale, strategies and materials that they were about to use. After the materials were used they were evaluated by both teachers and students to provide feedback to the core teachers. Most importantly lessons were observed by panel members and discussions were held after the lessons to evaluate and clarify teaching strategies. Some lessons were also video-taped and could be used as a resource bank for the dissemination of good practice. Focussed lesson observation and regular, well-organised planning meetings were conducted to encourage the input and participation of all panel members.
5. To ensure alignment of **assessment** with the learning/teaching objectives, teachers wrote their own items for the reading papers in tests/exams rather than relying on ready-made materials.

US Exploring Nature – Reading Extension – Module Plan			
Lesson	Language skills Focus	Reading skills/strategies	Lesson Procedures
Text 1: Radio Programme 1-3	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guessing word meaning from context</li> <li>Dictionary Skills</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the situation and "broadcast" and "programme" contextual clues.</li> <li>Proceed to the radio programme.</li> <li>Support SS to guess the "programme" in "radio" the timetable.</li> <li>Raise SS' awareness of a word.</li> <li>Proceed to the dictionary.</li> </ol>

b. In line 21, "... the ant saw a hunter raising his gun to shoot her." The meaning of the word 'shoot' is ...

**Shoot**

- to move quickly or suddenly in one direction
- to kill or wound a person or an animal with a bullet
- to kick, hit or throw the ball into a goal or to score a point

It is used as a/an (noun / verb / adjective / adverb) in this sentence.

Students learn to guess word meanings and choose from the dictionary entries the meaning of a word that has multiple meanings.

These are tested in the school assessment papers.

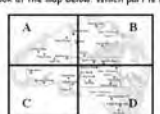
Teachers also devised assessment papers for each unit of work to assess students' mastery of the reading strategies taught and to familiarise students with the TSA question format:

Some pronouns in the passage are selected for teaching *pronoun referencing* and some are used in the assessment paper.

1. In line 1 what does "we" refer to?

- The Hiking Club
- All schoolmates
- Teachers
- New hikers

2. Look at the map below. Which part is the hike?



3. Find a word in paragraph 1 to replace "great" in line 3.

4. Who can participate in the hike?

- New hikers
- Experienced hikers
- New and experienced hikers
- Committee members of the Hiking Club

5. Which of the following statements is correct?

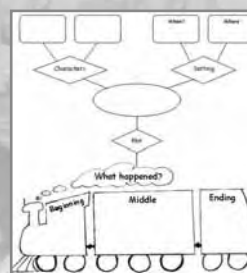
- We will catch a mini bus from Lau Shui Heung Reservoir.
- The hike will begin in the Sha Lo Tung Valley.
- It is unsure if we will stop at the village of Cheung Uk.
- We will meet at Lau Shui Heung Reservoir.

TSA data analysis shows that students tend to choose answers containing familiar words from a localised text. Therefore, the distracters are designed to have this feature and students are taught how to tackle them.

### Stage 2 (Jul. 08 onwards): S1-3

#### S1

- The project coordinator and the S1 teachers from last year shared and reflected upon their experiences at co-planning meetings. A **learning community** was built up, so although new members in the team were unfamiliar with the project, they could adapt their teaching strategies to teach the reading strategies.
- The plans and materials were adapted to suit the learning needs of the S1 students and to augment the integration of other language skills with an emphasis on the reading-to-writing link. More writing tasks were devised and the design of tasks was improved.



Students learn *story elements* and the *3-part structure* of a story. A *graphic organiser* is used to help them brainstorm and organise ideas in the pre-writing stage.

3. Previously, teachers taught the simple past tense following their own teaching schedules and using their own materials. However, with the reading extension modules the grammar point can now be taught in the context of a story within the same timeframe:

<p><b>B</b></p> <p>The blow hard. The men <u>fell</u> the cold, strong wind. He <u>hugged</u> to have trouble walking. The North Wind <u>blew</u> harder and harder. The man <u>held</u> his coat tighter and tighter <u>around</u> himself. The air <u>around</u> him <u>became</u> <u>freezing</u> cold. (Paragraph 3)</p> <p><b>C</b></p> <p>He <u>got</u> out a bag, <u>toss</u> yawn, "Oh, Oh! It's so hot" and <u>took</u> off his coat. (Paragraph 4)</p> <p><b>D</b></p> <p>They <u>looked</u> down from the sky and saw a big, strong man walking up the road. (Paragraph 2)</p> <p>Up in the sky, the Sun <u>looked</u> at the North Wind and said, "Sometimes it is better to be gentle than to be forceful." (Paragraph 4)</p>	+	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 33%;">Regular verbs</th> <th style="width: 33%;">Rules</th> <th style="width: 33%;">More examples</th> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <th>Irregular verbs</th> <th>Rules</th> <th>More examples</th> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </table>	Regular verbs	Rules	More examples				Irregular verbs	Rules	More examples			
Regular verbs	Rules	More examples												
Irregular verbs	Rules	More examples												

Students read extracts of a story, identify the verbs in past tense, discuss their use and deduce the different ways that they are formed.

### S2

More complex reading strategies were taught to be applied to higher-level texts. For example, last year, S1 students learned to use strong contextual clues to make inferences. This year, they were further stretched to understand the deeper meaning of a text by identifying and using a variety of more subtle clues.

### S3

The core teachers recognised the importance of explicit teaching of reading strategies for the S3 curriculum. They decided to develop reading packages using past TSA papers to give students the reading skills and strategies that they need in the TSA.

## Impact

### 1. Curriculum

- A **core curriculum** was devised as a result of co-planning. Links between different learning objectives were created so that they could reinforce each other to enhance learning effectiveness.
- Assessment for learning was improved and was used to inform the teaching of reading, as well as assessing other language skills.

Text	Adjectives for describing North Wind	
	(adjectives)	(meaning)
1. The North Wind said, "I am strong."	Strong	强壮
2. "Let's have a contest," the North Wind said.	Proud	骄傲
3. The North Wind thought for a long time.	careful hesitant	小心 犹豫

Integrating *making inferences* and vocabulary teaching: students use contextual clues to understand a character in a story and *learn adjectives* to describe him

An example of reinforcing the **reading-to-writing** link: students *understand text structure* and *make text-to-self connections* to write a modern fable using the writing framework:

<p><b>The North Wind and the Sun says</b> It reminds me of my experience.</p> <p>The North Wind blew harder and harder.</p> <p>The man held his coat tighter and tighter.</p> <p>The Sun shone its warm, comfortable light down on the man.</p> <p>The man took off his coat.</p> <p>Sometimes it is better to be gentle than to be forceful.</p>	➔	<p><b>The North Wind and the Sun says</b> It reminds me of my experience.</p> <p>Problem: The man took off his coat.</p> <p>Solution: Once upon a time, in the land of the Sun.</p> <p>Character 1: Powerful</p> <p>Action 1: What he did</p> <p>Character 2: gentle</p> <p>Action 2: What he did</p> <p>More Value</p>
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The **process approach**: in pre-writing, feedback is provided to students on elaboration of ideas

Noticeable improvements in both content and length of the revised plan



## 2. Learning and teaching of reading

- Teachers found that explicit teaching of reading strategies **enhanced students' comprehension of texts**. Students practised the reading strategies to understand connections between ideas, guess the meanings of words, used contextual clues to gain a deeper understanding of the text and interacted with the text in different ways. When asked, they were able to name some of the strategies they were using, showing that they were **aware** of applying them.
- Reading lessons were more student-centred and students showed a **higher level of engagement**. They were encouraged to share responses to the texts and became more willing to take risks. Their phonological awareness improved and they were more **confident in reading aloud**. Students reported:

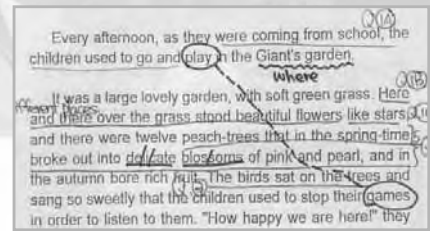


- I have to think more in English lessons.
- I am more interested in English.
- I am less afraid of English.
- I do not daydream (or fall asleep) in class as often.

- Varied book report forms used in the S1-3 Extensive Reading Scheme were revised to allow students to practise the reading strategies learned in class. Students were observed to be more **motivated to read**. The total number of book reports submitted by S1 students doubled in the first year that the project was implemented. In the second year, a similar figure was recorded in both S1 and S2.

- Teachers' **knowledge of and strategies for teaching reading increased**. More teachers took a more active role in developing the curriculum. A **collaborative sharing culture** was established. Teachers said:

- Our tailor-made materials can better cater for the needs of our students.
- I have gained insight into teaching reading and materials development.
- Students' improvement in the Second Uniform Test told me that they had learned better through repeated practice of the reading strategies in each unit.
- I am glad that I have been given the materials. I wouldn't be able to prepare them in such detail.
- We spent a lot of time developing the materials, but we know they can be reused in the future.



- Students take notes of
- (i) keywords when they answer the 'grand questions' to make connections between ideas
  - (ii) how to sound out unfamiliar words by identifying the number of syllables and blending letter sounds



A "Visualisation" book report: draw and write a summary



## Facilitating factors

1. Collaborative and committed teachers who are willing to try out new ideas and provide constructive feedback for the on-going evaluation of the project
2. Flexibility in various aspects, e.g. teaching schedule, choice of materials and extent of textbook adaptation
3. A supportive and adaptable school management which allows strategic teacher deployment where appropriate

## Suggestions

1. Explicit teaching of reading entails a **paradigm shift** in teaching. This can be achieved through:
  - attending professional development activities on topics pertinent to the development focus and the curriculum initiatives in the NSS
  - arranging co-teaching with or lesson demonstration by teachers who are more skilled in the strategies
  - using video clips of lesson segments at co-planning meetings for dissemination of good practices
  - arranging peer observation followed by post-lesson reflection
  - arranging for core teachers to disseminate the knowledge and skills they have gained
2. The development of new strategies in students is time-consuming but the initial effort proves to be worthwhile as the workload in the following years is reduced by having access to such resources. When planning the curriculum, it is important to consider:
  - creating curriculum space by adapting the textbook
  - building in practice opportunities throughout the school year so that students can practise using the reading strategies in different contexts
  - providing feedback to students that helps them focus on the application of the reading strategies
  - keeping new strategies to a manageable number
3. There is a need for appropriate **assessment tools**. It is important to consider:
  - Creating own assessment tools (e.g. reading questions for the texts being used) to assess students' use of the reading strategies)
  - Maximise the use of in-class observations of student learning as a form of formative assessment
  - Align school assessment papers with the teaching and learning objectives

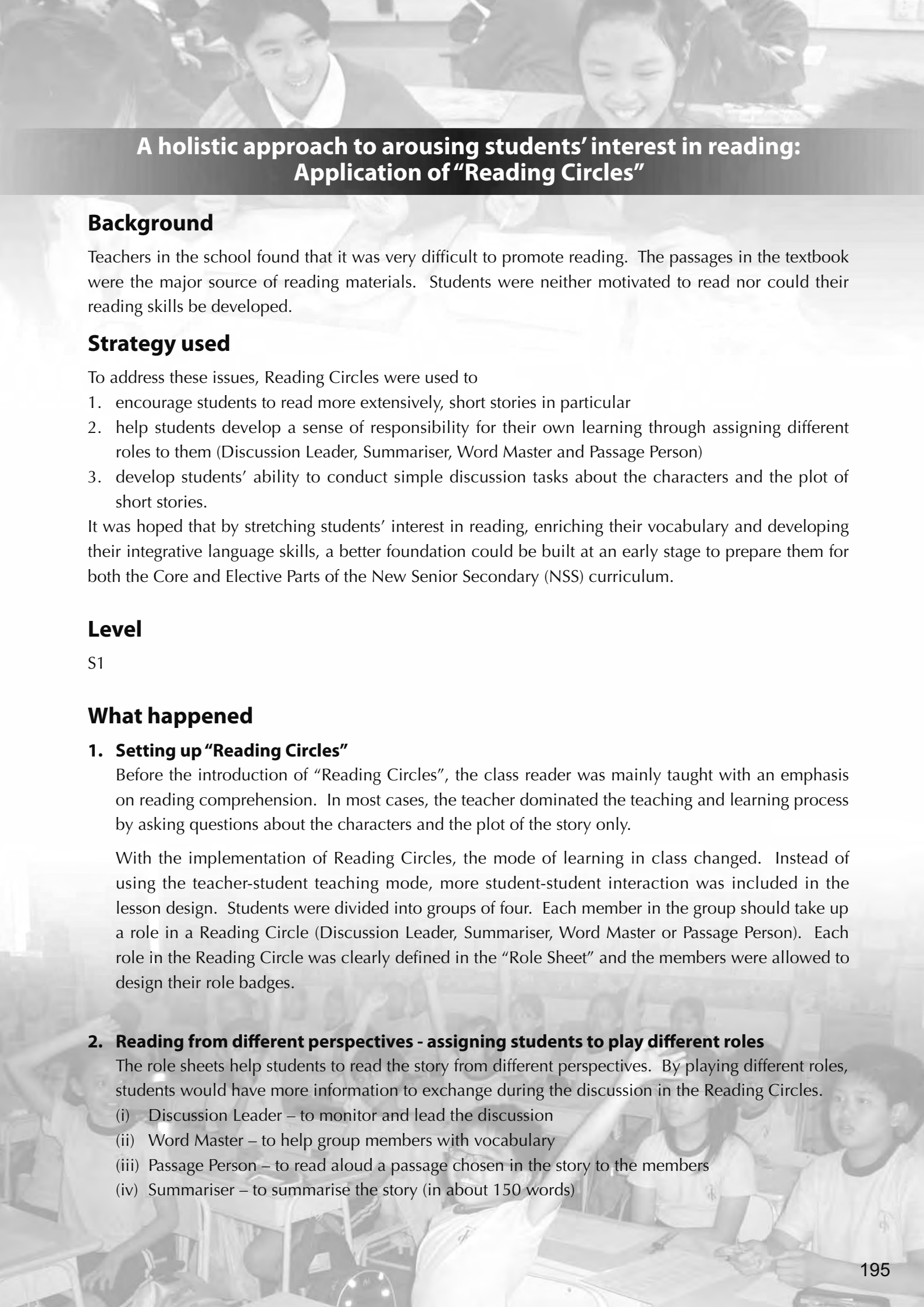
## Way forward

1. Continue to build a collaborative sharing culture and encourage **constructive professional dialogue** among teachers both in structured meetings and on informal occasions. Roles of core teachers may be extended in order to enhance the **sustainability** of the project. With enriched knowledge and enhanced skills in the development focuses, they can chair co-planning meetings, conduct lesson observation and give feedback to teachers.
2. Reinforce the **interface** between the junior secondary curriculum and the NSS. Internal sharing sessions can be used to inform vertical planning across the two Key Stages.

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**St Joan of Arc Secondary School**  
**Eva CHIU (Language Support Officer)**



## A holistic approach to arousing students' interest in reading: Application of "Reading Circles"

### Background

Teachers in the school found that it was very difficult to promote reading. The passages in the textbook were the major source of reading materials. Students were neither motivated to read nor could their reading skills be developed.

### Strategy used

To address these issues, Reading Circles were used to

1. encourage students to read more extensively, short stories in particular
2. help students develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning through assigning different roles to them (Discussion Leader, Summariser, Word Master and Passage Person)
3. develop students' ability to conduct simple discussion tasks about the characters and the plot of short stories.

It was hoped that by stretching students' interest in reading, enriching their vocabulary and developing their integrative language skills, a better foundation could be built at an early stage to prepare them for both the Core and Elective Parts of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum.

### Level

S1

### What happened

#### 1. Setting up "Reading Circles"





Before the introduction of "Reading Circles", the class reader was mainly taught with an emphasis on reading comprehension. In most cases, the teacher dominated the teaching and learning process by asking questions about the characters and the plot of the story only.

With the implementation of Reading Circles, the mode of learning in class changed. Instead of using the teacher-student teaching mode, more student-student interaction was included in the lesson design. Students were divided into groups of four. Each member in the group should take up a role in a Reading Circle (Discussion Leader, Summariser, Word Master or Passage Person). Each role in the Reading Circle was clearly defined in the "Role Sheet" and the members were allowed to design their role badges.

#### 2. Reading from different perspectives - assigning students to play different roles

The role sheets help students to read the story from different perspectives. By playing different roles, students would have more information to exchange during the discussion in the Reading Circles.

- (i) Discussion Leader – to monitor and lead the discussion
- (ii) Word Master – to help group members with vocabulary
- (iii) Passage Person – to read aloud a passage chosen in the story to the members
- (iv) Summariser – to summarise the story (in about 150 words)

<p>St Bonaventure College and High School Reading Circle</p>  <h2>Discussion Leader</h2> <p>Learning objective: I can be a discussion leader.</p> <p>Your job is to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ read the story <u>twice</u>, and prepare <u>at least five general questions</u> about it;</li> <li>✓ ask <u>one or two questions</u> to start the Reading Circle discussion;</li> <li>✓ make sure that everyone participates in the discussion;</li> <li>✓ ask each member to present the information they prepared;</li> <li>✓ keep the discussion going;</li> </ul>	<p>St Bonaventure College and High School Reading Circle</p>  <h2>Word Master</h2> <p>Learning objective: I can be a word master.</p> <p>Your job is to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ read the story, and look for words or short phrases that are new or difficult to understand, or are important in the story;</li> <li>✓ choose five words (only five) that you think are important for this story and that your group mates should know;</li> <li>✓ explain the meanings of these five words in simple English to the group;</li> <li>✓ tell the group <u>why these words are important</u> for understanding this story;</li> </ul>
<p>St Bonaventure College and High School Reading Circle</p>  <h2>Passage Person</h2> <p>Learning Objective: I can be a passage person.</p> <p>The Passage Person's job is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ read the story, and find important, or difficult passages;</li> <li>✓ make notes about at least three passages that are important for the plot, or that explain the characters, or that have very interesting language;</li> <li>✓ prepare to read each passage to the group;</li> <li>✓ ask the group one or two questions about each passage.</li> </ul> <p>Think about why you have chosen your passages. Are they <u>important</u>? Did you find them <u>informative</u>? Were you <u>surprised</u>? Are they <u>funny</u>? Did they make you feel <u>confused</u>? Are they <u>well-written</u>?</p>	<p>St Bonaventure College and High School Reading Circle</p>  <h2>Summariser</h2> <p>Learning objective: I can be a summariser.</p> <p>The summariser's job is to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ read the story at least twice and make notes about the characters, events and ideas;</li> <li>✓ find the key points that everyone must know to understand and remember the story;</li> <li>✓ retell the story in a short summary (one or two minutes) to the group, using your writing to help you;</li> <li>✓ talk about your summary to the group, using your writing to help you.</li> </ul>

### 3. Teachers' demonstration and ongoing feedback

In order to help students understand the main tasks of each role, the S1 teachers themselves took up the roles and tried out the discussion in Reading Circles. The teachers' demonstration was video-taped and students were instructed to play the assigned roles by following their teachers' examples. When Reading Circles were implemented in the classroom, the teacher also kept very close monitoring of students' discussion to make sure that the participants were on tasks.

### 4. Selection of reading materials

After discussion, it was decided that only 4 stories would be selected for use in the Reading Circles in S1. These stories were selected as the teachers believed that the texts could help students to conduct "real life" and "meaningful" discussions.

**Mr. Harris and the Night Train**

Jennifer Bassett

Preparing for the Reading Circle  
St Bonaventure College  
16 January

Reading Circle : something different?  
Be focussed

Discussion Leader : How would you assign the roles this time?

Summariser: Will you focus on Mr. Harris's experience or the guard's story? Why?

Word Master: Can you focus on the action words?

Passage Person: Will you focus on the history or the action scenes of the story? Why?

## Difficulties and suggestions

There was acute learning diversity in most classes. Among the 10 groups of Reading Circles (4 students in one group), there were always some very efficient groups that could finish the assigned tasks much faster. There were also some groups of students who came to class unprepared and could not perform the tasks assigned.

After discussion, the teachers came up with different sets of guiding questions for students of different ability. For very weak students, more pre-reading guidance was given. Some guiding scripts for presentation were also prepared for the lower ability students and the groups which could not participate in the free discussions. For the higher ability groups, more challenging questions were asked.

## Revisiting the teaching of reading skills

After the third cycle of implementation, the teachers found that students needed to be guided through the basic reading skills so as to help them read longer stories in the upper graded books. In the fourth cycle of the Reading Circles implementation, the following reading skills were integrated into the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities prior to engaging students in discussion:

**skimming   scanning   making reference   making inference   making contextual guess**

## What teachers and students think

In the debriefing and evaluation sessions, both teachers and students expressed that Reading Circles helped students' language learning in the following ways:

1. Most students agreed that they were more motivated to complete the pre-discussion reading assignments.
2. Most students found the discussion tasks more manageable because of the continuous monitoring and feedback given by the teacher.
3. Most students thought that they were more involved in the discussion activity than before as they all had a role to play.
4. Most students found that they could actively apply the reading strategies (e.g. skimming, scanning, referencing and guessing meaning of words from context) in the Reading Circles because they were more task oriented.
5. All the teachers found that students were better motivated to do the pre-reading exercises. They also found that most students could participate in the discussion tasks and complete the post-reading assignments.

The implementation of Reading Circles was found to be a successful strategy in promoting reading in English extensively in the school. The successful experience was shared with another school in the same district as a professional development activity in May 2009.





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Lin, Chia-Hui. (2004). Literature circles. Teacher Librarian, 31 (3), 23-25.

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**St Bonaventure College**  
**Anne CHAN (Language Support Officer)**

The background of the page features a grayscale photograph of a classroom. In the upper portion, two students are looking at a document together. In the lower portion, a group of students is seated at desks, with one student in the foreground raising their hand. The overall scene depicts an active learning environment.

## The teaching of phonics to help students read fluently and accurately

### Background

Students in the school have always been found unable to pronounce words in sentences correctly when answering teachers' questions. In response to this concern, enthusiastic teachers initiated an oral programme requiring students to read storybooks aloud in order to provide more opportunities for them to practise pronunciation and read aloud. However, students tended to be passive in the programme as they were unsure of the pronunciation of some words in the stories and lacked confidence in reading the text aloud. Being aware of the difficulties of the students, this group of secondary school teachers would like to develop a phonics package which will equip students with the phonics skills necessary to enable students to read and decode unfamiliar words by sounding them out. In this way, students will be more confident in reading words aloud at sentence level with the help of the phonics skills they have acquired.

### Level

S1

### Strategies used

#### 1. Forming a core team to work on the task

Four teachers including the panel head and junior panel head have been chosen as curriculum leaders. Due to the funding of the English Enhancement Grant (EEG), 2.5 of their teaching sessions (55 minutes per session) have been reduced so that they can work as a core team and focus on developing the materials for the phonics package.

#### 2. Curriculum re-mapping to meet the needs of students

Originally, students had the read-aloud-storybooks programme every week. Teachers decided to change the frequency of lessons to once every two weeks so that some lesson time could be devoted to the phonics package. Students will have the read-aloud programme and phonics class in alternate weeks. This arrangement is also essential for enabling the students to practise and consolidate the phonics skills learned in the read aloud lesson.

#### 3. Placing more emphasis on phonics skills




Teachers believe that the teaching of phonics can improve students' ability in identifying words so that they can read more fluently and accurately. According to the Curriculum Development Council (2002), it is not only useful to "develop learners' speaking (pronunciation)" but also "writing (spelling) and reading skills, and to facilitate their acquisition of stress, rhythm and intonation" (KLA Curriculum Guide P1-S3, 2002, p.9). Therefore, equipping students with phonics skills and allowing them to apply the skills in lesson time is seen as a crucial step in fostering the learning of the target language. Teachers decided to compile a list of key phonics rules to be taught as systematic instruction in phonics skills results in superior reading achievement (Anderson et al., 1985; Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1991).

#### 4. Selecting appropriate materials to motivate students to learn

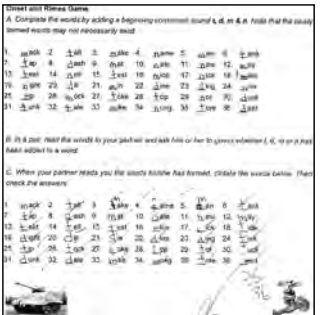
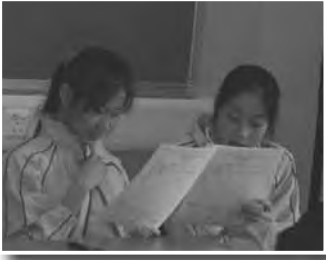
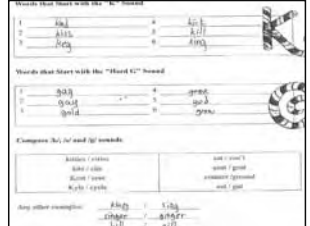

In an informal interview with students, most of them expressed that they had learned phonics in primary schools. Some added that phonics is a simple topic that they have been handling well. Therefore, teachers noted that they have to be very careful in selecting and designing the lesson materials. They reminded themselves not to repeat teaching some basic phonics skills but to introduce some rules that students have not learned or have not learned successfully in primary schools. To further enrich the package and raise students' interest in learning it, teachers tried to incorporate a variety of lesson materials from different sources, for example, videos, songs and web pages. They also tried to provide abundant opportunities for students to practise the skills and strategies they were learning in real reading activities so that the students could see the value of phonics for learning to read (Adams, 1990).

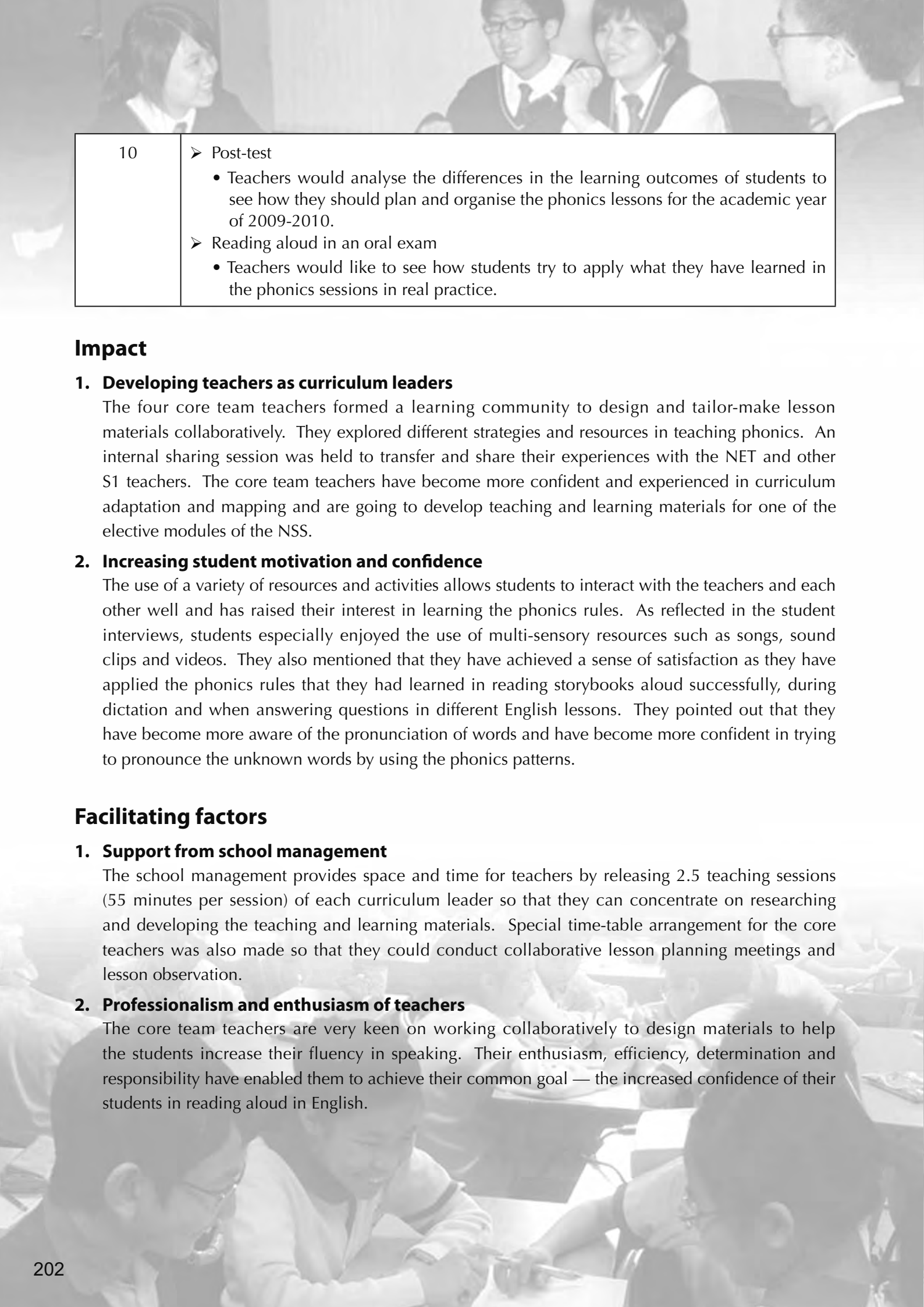
### What happened

Ten topics have been developed over the course of this academic year, including topics such as basic vowel sounds, consonants, voiced consonants and blending. There were also pre- and post-tests designed to help teachers monitor the progress of students. A summary of the topics and main learning tasks covered in this academic year is listed below:

No. of topic	Topic and learning task	
1	<p>Pre-test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A pre-test was conducted to determine students' knowledge of the phonics rules.</li> <li>➤ Modifications of the lesson materials were made to ensure the relevancy and level of difficulty of the lesson content.</li> </ul>	
2	<p>Basic Vowel sounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers showed students some songs and asked them to sing along.</li> <li>➤ Teachers showed students a video on "a, e, i, o, u" to practise the pronunciation of words.</li> <li>➤ Teachers asked students to work on a discovery game in pairs.</li> </ul>	 <p>Teacher demonstrating the use of vowels in the lesson</p>
3	<p>Consonants: f, v, b, p</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers asked students to try out the tongue twisters of "b" and "p".</li> <li>➤ Teachers went through some spelling rules of "gh", "ph", "ps", "pn", "mb", "bt".</li> <li>➤ Teachers pointed out some spelling rules of "f" and "v" and conducted a listening online activity of ETV.</li> </ul>	 <p>Teachers using the tongue twister to help students articulate the sounds</p>



<p>4</p>	<p>Consonants: t, d, m, n</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers asked students to work on an “Onset and Rimes” Game.</li> </ul>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Consonants: sh, th, th (voiced)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers showed students a video about the difference between voiced “th” and voiceless “th” and practised after the speaker.</li> <li>➤ Students listened to some sound clips and practised the pronunciation.</li> <li>➤ Students read the dialogue and underlined all the /ð/ sounds.</li> <li>➤ Students read a tongue twister aloud in pairs.</li> </ul>	 <p>Students practised the role play.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Consonants: k, g, j, y</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A webpage was shown and students were asked to find some words with consonants “k”, “g”, “j” and “y”, complete the worksheet and say the words out.</li> <li>➤ Students were asked to compare “k”, “s” and “g” sounds and to distinguish between them by saying the pairs of words aloud.</li> <li>➤ Two more videos were shown as consolidation when students accomplished the above tasks.</li> </ul>	 <p>Students were asked to fill in the worksheet after searching some suitable words on the internet.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Consonants: s, z, l, r, zh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers went through the spelling rules with students.</li> <li>➤ Teachers asked students to identify the sounds in a silly story.</li> <li>➤ Teachers asked students to give more examples of the sounds using their storybook and complete a table.</li> <li>➤ Students compared the “r” and “l” sounds using the rules learned.</li> </ul>	
<p>8</p>	<p>Consonants: w, qu, h</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students learned to identify the sounds.</li> <li>➤ Students were asked to compare and distinguish “w” and “qu” (/kw/).</li> <li>➤ Students worked on two activities to practise the spelling rules of “w”, “qu” and “h”.</li> </ul>	 <p>Students worked in pairs to practise the spelling rules.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Blending</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students worked on a grid game on blending sounds.</li> <li>➤ Students tried out an activity to contrast “cl”, “pl” and “gl”.</li> <li>➤ Students found more examples from their read aloud storybooks and filled in the worksheet.</li> </ul>	



10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Post-test           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers would analyse the differences in the learning outcomes of students to see how they should plan and organise the phonics lessons for the academic year of 2009-2010.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Reading aloud in an oral exam           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers would like to see how students try to apply what they have learned in the phonics sessions in real practice.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## Impact

### 1. Developing teachers as curriculum leaders

The four core team teachers formed a learning community to design and tailor-make lesson materials collaboratively. They explored different strategies and resources in teaching phonics. An internal sharing session was held to transfer and share their experiences with the NET and other S1 teachers. The core team teachers have become more confident and experienced in curriculum adaptation and mapping and are going to develop teaching and learning materials for one of the elective modules of the NSS.

### 2. Increasing student motivation and confidence

The use of a variety of resources and activities allows students to interact with the teachers and each other well and has raised their interest in learning the phonics rules. As reflected in the student interviews, students especially enjoyed the use of multi-sensory resources such as songs, sound clips and videos. They also mentioned that they have achieved a sense of satisfaction as they have applied the phonics rules that they had learned in reading storybooks aloud successfully, during dictation and when answering questions in different English lessons. They pointed out that they have become more aware of the pronunciation of words and have become more confident in trying to pronounce the unknown words by using the phonics patterns.

## Facilitating factors

### 1. Support from school management

The school management provides space and time for teachers by releasing 2.5 teaching sessions (55 minutes per session) of each curriculum leader so that they can concentrate on researching and developing the teaching and learning materials. Special time-table arrangement for the core teachers was also made so that they could conduct collaborative lesson planning meetings and lesson observation.

### 2. Professionalism and enthusiasm of teachers

The core team teachers are very keen on working collaboratively to design materials to help the students increase their fluency in speaking. Their enthusiasm, efficiency, determination and responsibility have enabled them to achieve their common goal — the increased confidence of their students in reading aloud in English.



## Way forward

The curriculum leaders will sustain the good practice of the work and the second part of the programme will be launched in the first term of the 2009-2010 academic year for the same group of students, who will then be in S2. As a continuation, six more topics including long and short vowels, syllables, word stress, pronunciation of “ed”, magic “e” and schwa sound “ə” will be covered.

In addition, the curriculum leaders would like to extend the practice of curriculum adaptation to more levels. They have set the directions for the curriculum planning of the junior form this year and are determined to introduce further planning for the curriculum in senior forms. They would like to commence with the elective module of the NSS — Learning English through Short Stories. Some other teachers on the panel have already shown a willingness to join the core team. With the experience gained this year, it is hoped that the collaboration between the core members and the new team members will result in further success in adapting the school-based curriculum.

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**Lok Sin Tong Young Ko Hsiao Lin Secondary School**  
**Wendy TSUI (Language Support Officer)**

## Strategies of fostering English speaking skills at Key Stage 3

### Background

Speaking skills are important language skills to be acquired for self expression, communication and interaction. In face of the curricular initiatives such as Territory-wide System Assessment and School-based Assessment, secondary teachers tend to focus more on developing speaking skills of their students in the secondary curriculum. As found in some school projects, **effective curriculum leadership, rich contextual and professional knowledge and skills, and increased speaking opportunities** are some essential elements bringing positive changes to students' language skills development. In this article, two secondary school cases are used to illustrate how these elements create good impact on learning motivation and solid speaking skills of KS3 students.

### Levels

S1-3

### Strategies used

1. **Involve the curriculum leaders as key players** since they have an important role to play in allocating the use of the English Enhancement Grant, planning the speaking curriculum vertically, deploying teachers, and ensuring the quality and continuity of the project.
2. **Enhance teachers' professional knowledge and skills** through diagnosing students' needs in developing school-based learning outcomes, drawing up year and unit plans, making use of professional development opportunities, and building a bank of resources and tools for use by both teachers and students.
3. **Maximise opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills and confidence** through linking the formal and informal curricula and tapping resources available in the community.

### What happened

Focus	School-based example
1. Involve the curriculum leaders as key players	<p><b>Involving curriculum leaders:</b></p> <p>Curriculum leaders can encourage professional knowledge of teaching and learning, facilitate decision making on resource allocations, monitor and gauge the effectiveness of special programs (Masters, 2002), and model the transformation of learning cultures of the schools (Hargreaves, 2003).</p> <p>With the English Enhancement Grant, both schools were able to develop curriculum leaders through setting up special groups and involve them as key players.</p>



Curriculum review group and S1 teachers (YOT)



Curriculum teams were set up at LSS.

### YOT

Yan Oi Tong Chan Wong Suk Fong Memorial Secondary School (YOT) set up a curriculum review group for S1. With more time and space for collaborative planning, the group (the vice principal, the panel chair, the S1 coordinator and an experienced teacher) reviewed and developed the S1 curriculum, coordinated phonics workshops and Ambassador Scheme (S6), played a bridging role between the Language Support Officer and the S1 teachers in a speaking skills development project, and gave concrete suggestions on S1 teaching.

### LSS

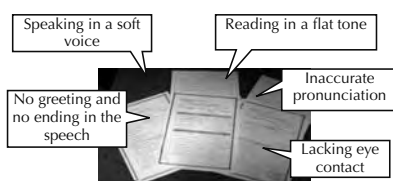
Starting from 2007, three curriculum teams were set up in ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School (LSS) to design the school-based curriculum for S1, S2 and S3. The vice principal and the junior form panel head were involved in all the three teams to oversee work progress and give timely support. While the English teachers were nurtured into curriculum leaders with expertise for the forms they taught, the vice principal and the panel head also took the lead in sharing their school practices with other schools.

## 2. Enhance teachers' professional knowledge and skills

### Criteria of oral presentation assessment:

- Vocal delivery
  - Clear pronunciation of speech
  - Good pace and fluency
  - Good use of the voice colours: (pitch, emotion, stress, etc.)
  - Voice projection
- Platform manner
  - Greeting: warm and pleasant
  - Develop familiarity and ease with audience using eye contact
  - Show good body posture and look calm and confident
  - Smile and look friendly
  - Avoid boring the audience by using pause, silence or humour, etc.
  - End nicely

Teachers got contextual clues of students' speaking skills.



Class profile of speaking skills of S1 students

### YOT

#### **Diagnosing students' needs in developing school-based learning outcomes:**

S1 teachers at YOT decided to strengthen speaking skills of their students in 2008-09 through curriculum planning to provide focussed support at a key stage. They believed that a good understanding of the students' strengths and weaknesses in speaking could enable teachers to make informed decisions on teaching and learning, set realistic learning outcomes and devise appropriate activities for the students.

Thus the teachers worked with the curriculum review group and the Language Support Officer to examine available data like Territory-wide System Assessment data and student performance data and learned more about their weaknesses in speaking.

#### **Internal profiling:**

YOT S1 teachers analysed the first mini speaking presentation on "my family" and reached some conclusions on the profile of the students. After the initial oral presentation assessment, the teachers identified the strengths and weaknesses of their students in this aspect. To cater for the diversity in ability levels across eight different groups, the teachers set some expected learning outcomes for each group. For example,  
 Group 1: students should have better eye contact, speak louder and speak with a suitable beginning and ending;  
 Group 2: students should display confidence in a presentation using appropriate body language.

S1

**1<sup>st</sup> term:**

- **Speaking:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, etc.

Task (prepared)

- Show and tell/ 1-minute presentation
- Storytelling
- Poetry recitation

**2<sup>nd</sup> term:**

- **Speaking:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, interaction skills, basic debate skills including use of attention getters

Task (prepared)

- Individual presentation
- Group discussion
- Small-scale debate

S2



**1<sup>st</sup> term:**

- **Speaking skills:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, etc.

Task (prepared)

- Individual presentation
- Group discussion
- Role play

**2<sup>nd</sup> term:**

- **Speaking skills:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, debate language and skills, including developing arguments and counter-arguments

Task (prepared)

- Individual presentation
- Group discussion
- Small-scale debate



An expert from HKU and network teachers gave feedback on the vertical curriculum plan of LSS.

LSS

**Drawing up a holistic plan:**

To ensure that all junior form English teachers of LSS could have an overview of the progressive development of speaking skills, a vertical plan was drawn up detailing the target speaking skills and tasks for S1, S2 and S3. Students developed individual speaking skills and then moved on to group speaking skills. There was more time for preparation at first. Then spontaneity was stressed at a later stage. The gist of the plan is shown here:

S3

**1<sup>st</sup> term:**

- **Speaking skills:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, skills in making a speech

Task (prepared & spontaneous)

- Individual presentation (making a speech)
- Group discussion

**2<sup>nd</sup> term:**

- **Speaking skills:** Paralinguistic features e.g. volume, eye contact, body language, debate language and skills, including defining motions and making rebuttals

Task (prepared & spontaneous)

- Individual presentation
- Group discussion
- Debate

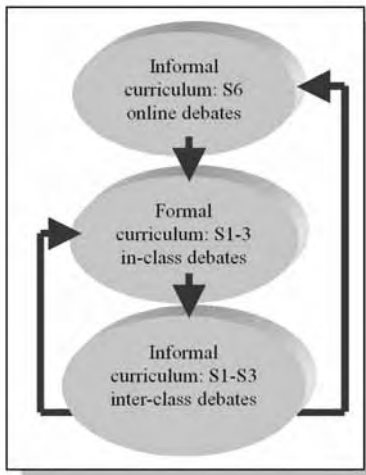


**Making use of professional development opportunities:**

It is essential to draw up a vertical curriculum plan which can address students' needs. Thus, apart from discussing with curriculum team members, LSS teachers also made use of professional development opportunities. They sought advice from consultants like Language Support Officers and language experts. They belong to a teacher network which consists of teachers sharing common interest in developing speaking skills. In one of the professional sharing sessions, they presented their vertical plan and collected feedback from experts and teachers from other schools. This learning community facilitated cross-fertilisation and enhanced teachers' professional knowledge and skills. As a result, they were able to modify their plan to cater for the needs of their students.



S6 students got ready for the Online Debate.



The formal and informal curricula complemented each other in the development of debate skills and a debate resource bank.

### Building a bank of resources:

Every year, S6 students from LSS take part in an extra-curricular activity called “Online Debate” with schools in the mainland and around the world. The teachers saw this ECA as a good opportunity for developing their resource bank on debating to promote in-class and out-of-class debate activities. Training sessions for S6 were conducted and filmed. The clips are not just useful for preparing S6 online debates in the future, but also for producing teaching materials for KS3.

In less than two years, a resource bank with authentic clips for demonstration and illustration was developed. The bank was not just useful for teaching debating in class, but also paved the way for inter-class debate contests. In fact, all debate-related activities were filmed to enrich the resource bank and LSS teachers found that they were more ready to promote debating at different levels.

3. Maximise opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills and confidence
  - (i) Formal learning
    - (a) Adoption of an integrated-skill approach

### Adoption of a task-based approach:

An integrated-skill approach provides an opportunity for teachers to integrate language and learning strategy development (Paltridge, 1995), and for students to practise all the language skills in an integrated, natural, communicative way through content- or task-based instruction (Oxford, 2001).

#### YOT

The highlight of task-based design of the modular units at YOT was an individual presentation at the end of each unit. The students would have to master the grammar focus, do free writing and practise reading aloud the text at home to prepare for a presentation. This reading aloud task helped both the average to more able students to develop fluency and the less able students to be less nervous when facing the audience.

**Writing :** Students Choose one teenager they spend their day with in the writing task

Students should work in pairs and explain very briefly their decision to their classmates.

Students work in pairs and read their own diary entry to their neighbour. Next, some students present their entries in front of the class.

On the free writing book, note down one special day. Each event should be concisely written (within 50 words).

Task: Teenage life - making friends



An LSS student performed his friendship poem after completing the task-based unit on "Friendship".

LSS

LSS also adopted the task-based approach for designing integrated units. Using this framework, they revamped textbook units and included appropriate learning materials like language arts and non-language arts texts. Students were given opportunities to learn and consolidate various knowledge and skills, such as the four language skills with a focus on speaking and writing, grammar in context and using vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

(b) Focussed skills training



- Four parts
1. General skills for speaking (as input)
  2. Class oral activities (for practice)
  3. From writing to mini speaking in class (guidelines)
  4. Mini speaking in class (assessment)

Skills training components



General speaking skills: Teacher's Manual

**Providing focussed skills training:**

Through providing focussed skills training in a variety of speaking and communication activities, student learning tends to be process-oriented and learning can be more student-centred.

YOT

YOT teachers chose mini presentation since the teachers could identify the basic problems of the fresh secondary one students in the task. The team then devised and provided intensive skills training on general speaking skills and presentation skills.

The curriculum review group, S1 teachers and the Language Support Officer produced a Teacher's Manual for skills training. In the Manual (see left), teachers used an assessment form (Part 4) to report on the overall class profile after the first round mini oral presentation. Teachers used the oral activities (Part 2) in their own groups, depending on the learning outcomes decided for their own groups. The guidelines (Part 3) also gave solid reference for the different objectives and contexts of an oral presentation task.

LSS

A special feature of the plan of LSS is that debating was included at all three levels. The level of challenge was adjusted by the target debate language and skills and choice of motions. The teachers of all the three forms tried to align the motions with textbook topics so as to provide opportunities for students to revisit and recycle their previous knowledge.

Topic	Motion
Animals (S1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is acceptable to keep animals in zoos.</li> <li>• Man should not keep animals as pets.</li> </ul>
Shopping Fashion (S2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students should wear school uniforms.</li> </ul>
Teen problems (S3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is acceptable for teenagers to date.</li> <li>• Online dating is harmful to teenagers.</li> </ul>

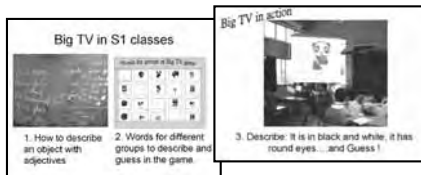
Debate motions used at LSS



(ii) Informal learning



Time Out in morning assembly



Class activities



Speaking Day



Student leaders were rehearsing with primary students for a mini-theatre.



S1 - S3 debate contests at LSS

**Integrating the formal and informal curricula:**

Making coherence of different components in the English curriculum by integrating the formal and informal curricula could consolidate learning content in some authentic and fun packed activities.

YOT

Small-scale cross level language enhancement activities were important for providing students with more opportunities to speak and interact in English. "Time Out" at YOT was a chance for students of all levels to give a short presentation to the schoolmates. Some S1 students were invited to give a presentation at different times of the year. The selection of students in each class depended on the purpose of the teachers. Some let the smart ones perform as they were more ready while others gave the weak ones a chance to present so as to help increase their confidence in speaking in public.

The school also took advantage of their Speaking Day in May 2009 to arrange a series of speaking activities for students. Apart from "One-minute English", song dedications, treasure hunts, and games stalls, there were parallel sessions for S1 students to play their favourite classroom activity Big TV and S2 to S4 students to enjoy watching an English Drama in the school hall.

The curriculum review group at YOT recommended S1 and S3 students to be student leaders in Tuen Mun Primary English Speaking Fair (21 Feb 2009). It was hoped that students' confidence in speaking and leadership skills could be improved in such district-based activities.

LSS

LSS teachers also integrated the formal and informal curricula to maximise students' learning opportunities. The junior form assembly periods were used for conducting extended speaking activities like theme-based presentations and inter-class debate contests. Students were given the chance to revisit classroom learning in a meaningful context. They were also able to learn from peers of the same form and also other forms.

A grayscale background image showing a group of students in a classroom. They are wearing school uniforms and are engaged in a discussion or activity. Some are looking at each other, while others are looking towards the camera. The setting appears to be a modern classroom with a whiteboard in the background.

## Impact

### 1. Yan Oi Tong Chan Wong Suk Fong Memorial Secondary School

The project at YOT began in September 2008 and it was still on its way to make some noticeable progress in the English speaking skills of S1 students when this article was written.

However, there were some good signs of outcome. As for **curriculum development**, the panel head pointed out that they added the new oral assessment component to the S1 curriculum this year. Moreover, a teacher also rightly pointed out that the assessment criteria and descriptors could serve as concrete indicators to inform curriculum design and to facilitate students to take part in directed or self-directed activities.

The teachers also had new experience in on-going development of modules. Instead of sticking to a set series of unit plans, they made use of new information on the weaknesses of students in speaking after a diagnostic analysis of their oral presentations. They revised the speaking guidelines and teacher's manual on S1 speaking skills continuously in level meetings. These are valuable outcomes of setting up a curriculum review group and fostering collaborative learning culture among the teachers.

For **teaching and learning**, a curriculum review group member said, "The activities may not have immediate impact on the language proficiency of the students (at this time of the year), but at least their confidence was boosted in the process of learning." A fellow teacher echoed, "The mini presentation was new to the S1 students and some students were eager to see their presentation clips." Thus the learning activities could enhance students' interest and confidence in their own performance. Students were also found to become more willing to speak and interact in English in the fun-filled context on Speaking Day. Students' attitudinal change was crucial for sustaining their interest and effort in various speaking activities.

### 2. ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School

There was more coherence in the junior-level English Language **curriculum** as a result of vertical planning. The teachers felt that such vertical plans enabled them to cater for the varied needs of students. They could avoid gaps in students' learning and introduce or reinforce learning points at the right time. As knowledge and skills were taught progressively, they could design tasks which were pitched at the right level. They were also glad that they drafted a three-year plan at the beginning of the project as it allowed time for them to make systematic plans, on-going evaluation and necessary modification.

As far as **teaching and learning** is concerned, with explicit teaching of speaking skills, LSS students demonstrated more confidence in speaking English. They were able to pay attention to paralinguistic features, such as eye contact, body language and voice use. In effect, the infusion of debating has brought about a lot of changes. Firstly, the debate component in the formal and informal curricula nurtured students' critical thinking. They learned to think from different perspectives and were more aware of social issues around them. Secondly, there was obvious teacher change. Some teachers were a little sceptical about students' ability in debating at first. The experience both inside and outside class has boosted their confidence. Now, the teachers are more ready to infuse debating into lessons and encourage students to take part in debate activities.

On the whole, the teachers believe that both teachers and students have accumulated much knowledge, skills and experience. All this is essential to enhance a smooth interface to the NSS curriculum.



## Facilitating factors

In both schools, curriculum leaders were seen as a catalyst to bring about changes. However, in order to nurture curriculum leaders and facilitate their work, there are some necessary conditions:

- 1. Funding:** Teachers should have **space and time** to effect changes. The two schools benefited from the English Enhancement Grant which helped create extra space and time for the curriculum leaders.
- 2. School support:** The curriculum leaders should be given **authority and autonomy**. The vice principals of both schools were involved and they could exercise their discretion to speed up the decision-making process. At the same time, they gave the teachers freedom and flexibility to plan the curriculum in a way they found most suitable for students. If curriculum leaders can support potential curriculum leaders, we can nurture more change agents for the future.

## Problems and difficulties

Both schools thought they had been racing with time. YOT teachers found the schedule tight when they tried to cover new elements. LSS teachers felt the same when they designed and implemented the vertical plan. Fortunately, at the start of the project, they already drafted a 3-year plan which allowed them time to make plans and revision. Therefore, facing the time constraint, early planning is indispensable as it would allow more time for preparation and modification. That explains why both schools have already made plans for the coming academic year. YOT will work more on assessment whereas LSS debating. Building on existing strengths, public speaking will be a common area which both schools will further look into.

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**ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School  
Florence YIP (Language Support Officer)  
Yan Oi Tong Chan Wong Suk Fong Memorial Secondary School  
Cecilia CHU (Language Support Officer)**



## Improving listening skills and responses to spoken texts

### Background

Many teachers find teaching listening skills a challenge. Unlike productive skills, there are limited observable traits to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses. Learners also have little control over what and who they listen to. Worst still, some learners have the misconception that listening is equal to listening exercises whereas giving a response means waiting for the beep and marking the right answers. Though a challenging task, the P4 English teachers from a primary school would like to explore ways to help their students develop their listening skills so as to improve their understanding of and responses to spoken texts.

### Level

P4

### Strategies used

The teachers believe that effective listening skills are “essential for successful interpersonal communication” (English Language Curriculum Guide, 2004). Developing students' listening skills and appropriate responses to spoken texts is thus not just an attempt to prepare for tests and examinations, but more importantly, for real-life interaction.

As data can “promote teaching and learning by facilitating identification of pupils' achievements and setting of targets” (Kirkup et al., 2005), the teachers decided to start with **analysing assessment data to identify students' needs** in listening. They then came to realise students' weaknesses, such as limited exposure and confidence.

To help students overcome the problems, the teachers paid attention to the “3 stages” in the listening process (Saricoban, 1999). At the pre-listening stage, they **used lead-ins** to activate prior knowledge and facilitate “listening for a purpose”. When preparing listening materials, they **stressed variety in task design**. Finally, students were **debriefed after listening** so as to consolidate knowledge and skills.

### What happened

#### 1. Analysing assessment data

The teachers analysed the Territory-wide System Assessment (2007) listening paper, school report and Territory-wide System Assessment report to understand students' needs more thoroughly. They then worked out possible measures to improve their students' performance.

Area for improvement	Possible action
Confidence and exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students listen to speakers of different backgrounds and with different accents to rid them of their fear in listening to English</li> <li>• Introduce more text types and question types</li> <li>• Expose students to tasks of both familiar and unfamiliar formats</li> </ul>
Listening to more than one chunk of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more extended tasks to help students identify key words</li> </ul>
Inference skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide stories to help students make inferences in context</li> </ul>
Distinguishing confusing words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students listen to confusing words and clarify pronunciation and stress patterns</li> </ul>
Understanding question requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise students' awareness in reading questions/ instructions</li> </ul>

## 2. Using lead-ins

The task-based approach was adopted to familiarise students with the context and purpose. The teachers helped students tune in by giving a clear lead and helping them anticipate what they would listen to soon. Therefore, students had **clearer expectations** and were **more able to predict meaning and feelings** while listening. (For more details of the lead-ins, please refer to the next section "Stressing variety in task design".)



Teachers using picture cues to activate prior knowledge

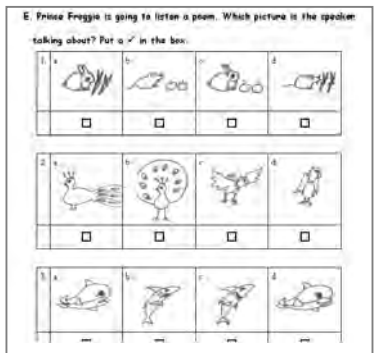
## 3. Stressing variety in task design

The following is a sample task-based module developed. The teachers introduced **various text types and question types**. There were **speakers differentiated by accent, age and race**. Both **contextualised and exam-formatted tasks** were used.

Target listening skill	Learning and teaching procedure	Listening material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve inference skills through stories</li> <li>➤ Listen and give written responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Set the scene: Introduce a friend - Prince Froggie. Students will meet him and his animal friends and learn more about animals.</li> <li>➤ Pre-teach animal words, comparatives and superlatives.</li> <li>➤ Give a prelude to a story about animals. Listen to the story. Answer questions on inference skills after listening.</li> <li>➤ Revisit comparatives and superlatives. Compare the features of different animal friends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ready made audio CD which comes with the textbook (recorded by native speakers)</li> <li>➤ Questions on inference skills</li> </ul>

- Handle more than one chunk of information through identifying key words
- Listen and give written responses

- Pre-teach animal types.
- Listen to animal poems and guess which animal is being described.

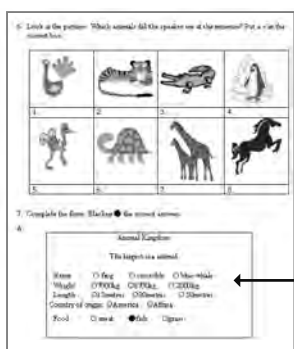


An excerpt of the animal poem worksheet

- Tailor-made poems recorded by secondary school students
- Lovely, white rabbit, eating fresh carrots
  - Big, pretty bird, opening up its tail
  - Clever, friendly fish, smiling at us all
  - Little, yellow insect, flying in the park
- Animal poems read aloud by secondary school students

- Build confidence using a familiar format
- Improve exposure using a variety of question types
- Handle more than one chunk of information through identifying key words
- Distinguish confusing words (e.g. thirty, thirteen)
- Listen and give written responses

- Revisit animal words.
- Set the scene: Prince Froggie’s teacher has visited the Science Museum. There is an exhibition about animals. Listen to her talking about the visit. Then, complete a Territory-wide System Assessment formatted worksheet with a range of questions to address students’ needs as stated on the left.



An excerpt of the worksheet


A question requiring students to handle more than one chunk of information

A question assessing students’ ability in distinguishing confusing words

- Tailor-made audio clip recorded by the NET



Teachers setting a variety of questions to address students’ needs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Handle more than one chunk of information through identifying key words</li> <li>➤ Listen and give written, verbal and non-verbal responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Contextualised task: Your animal friend Panda is lonely. Prince Froggie and you would like to introduce friends to him. Have a form activity in the hall. Listen to the teachers' instructions and make responses:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and act: Students follow teachers' instructions to meet animal friends. They do different actions e.g. jump, walk to the taller desk, etc.</li> <li>• Guess animal friends: Students listen to teachers' descriptions of various animal friends. They have to find and hold up the right animal pictures, read aloud or write animal words.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Extended writing task: Write about an animal you like and present your writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Instructions given by English teachers</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Students listening and responding to spoken texts in a form competition</p> </div>
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#### 4. Debriefing after listening

After listening, students were given the chance to re-read instructions and questions to reflect upon question requirements. Also, they analysed the transcripts of the spoken texts and spot key information. This helped them **identify their strengths and weaknesses** and **heighten their awareness** in listening to English.

### Impact

#### 1. Curriculum

There was a balance between authentic language use and exam-oriented tasks. The teachers did not avoid examination type of questions. They made appropriate use of them in the task-based modules as they believed students would feel more at ease with familiar formats. However, to increase their exposure, there was less reliance on listening task books and practise papers. The teachers were able to make use of the existing resources while infusing tailor-made materials into lessons. The curriculum design thus became **less exam-oriented and textbook-bound**.

#### 2. Teaching and learning

As variety was stressed, students became more used to a range of spoken texts presented in different ways and by different persons. They were less worried even when there was no beep sound or when it was someone else other than their own English teachers speaking English. Their **exposure and confidence** were boosted.

Students might have considered the form activity a game or competition only. However, in the process, they were actively using their listening skills and making appropriate responses. This contextualised task helped them revisit taught knowledge and skills. The game and competition mode also made the activity fun and memorable, creating a more lasting effect to **sustain learning**.



## Facilitating factors

### 1. Understanding strengths and weaknesses

The teachers not only reviewed the students' needs, but also their own strengths and experience. As mentioned, the task-based framework was adopted. They selected this approach as they got experience in designing task-based modules and that was a good **building block for further skills development**.

### 2. Use of resources

Some teachers may have hesitation in starting a listening project as they fear it may create a lot of work such as script writing and recording. The teachers of this school tried to make effective use of existing resources like the NET, audio CDs, etc. to release the burden. They also resorted to secondary school students as their outside resources. These are all strategies to **create time and space**, making the seemingly difficult task more manageable.

## Difficulties and suggestions

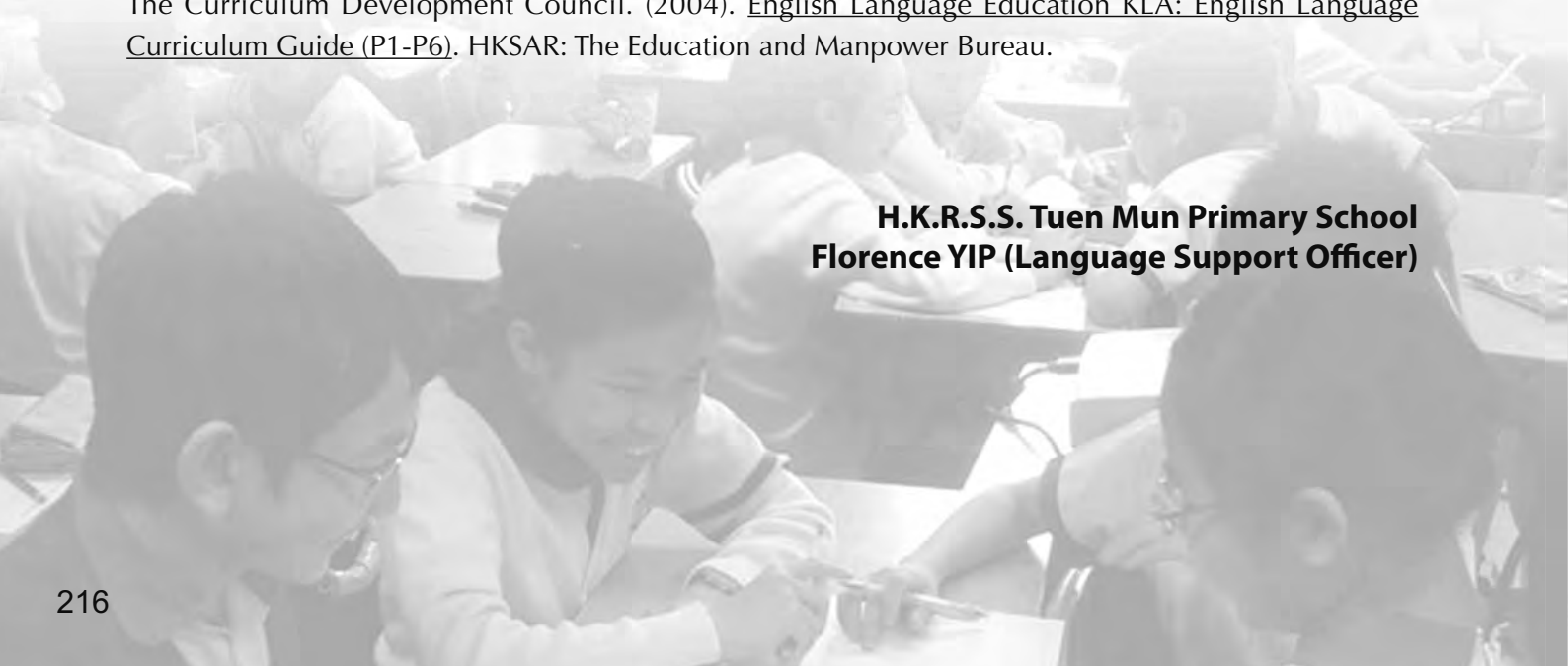
**Resource limitations** may be a major factor to consider before starting a listening project. There are various strategies for developing listening skills and responses to spoken texts. However, some may require extra resources like manpower or IT equipment. It is advisable that teachers **plan early** to review what they have and what they lack. They can then have more time to decide on what to cover in the project and make necessary arrangements. They should **think big** and **start small**. In fact, teachers can turn it into a long-term plan which may span over a few years. In the beginning, they may choose to work on the weaker areas first and then gradually build up the resources by stages. In this way, the listening project can stand a better chance to succeed and sustain its impact.

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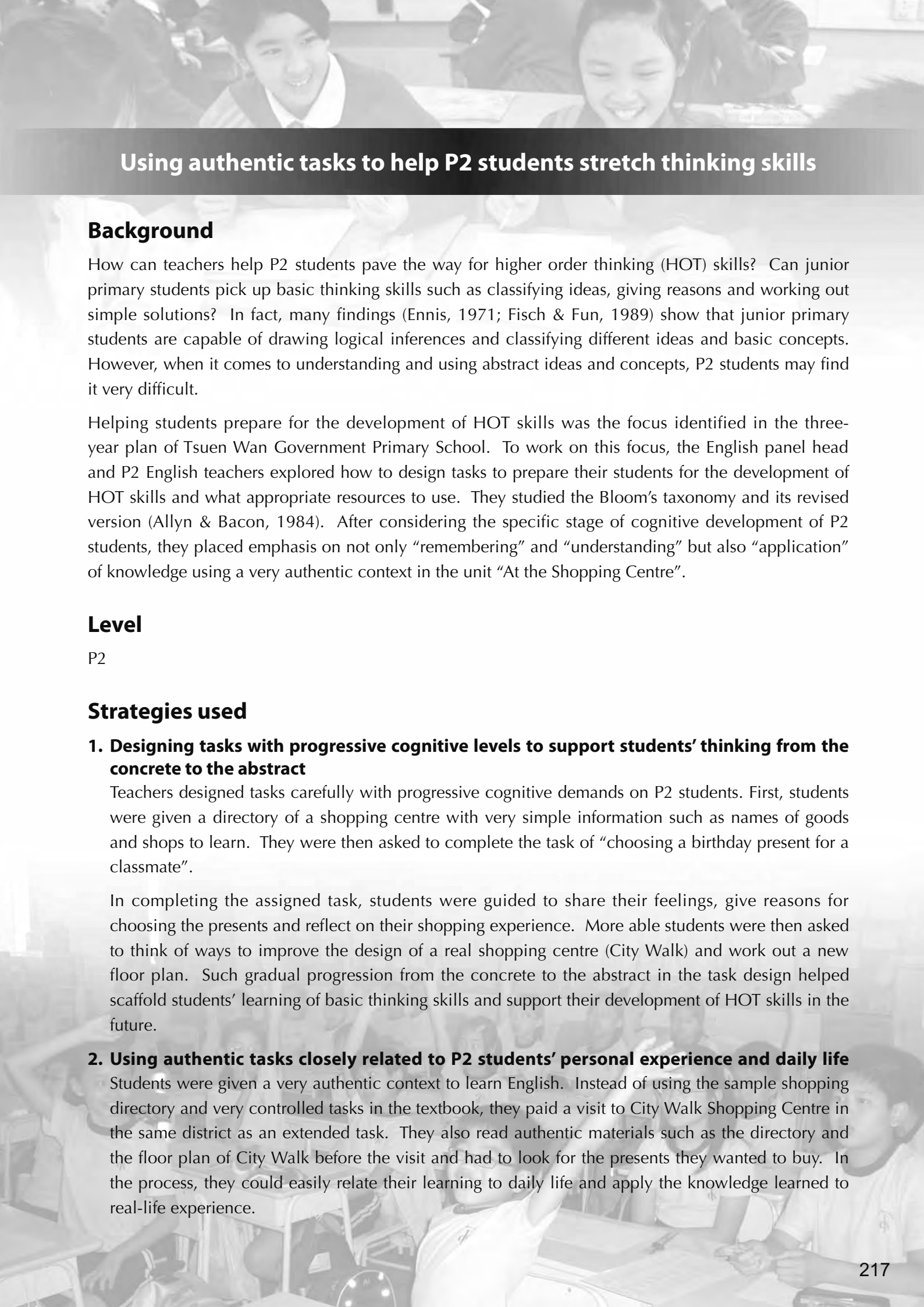
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**H.K.R.S.S. Tuen Mun Primary School  
Florence YIP (Language Support Officer)**



A background image showing a group of young students in a classroom setting, smiling and engaged in an activity. The image is slightly faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

## Using authentic tasks to help P2 students stretch thinking skills

### Background

How can teachers help P2 students pave the way for higher order thinking (HOT) skills? Can junior primary students pick up basic thinking skills such as classifying ideas, giving reasons and working out simple solutions? In fact, many findings (Ennis, 1971; Fisch & Fun, 1989) show that junior primary students are capable of drawing logical inferences and classifying different ideas and basic concepts. However, when it comes to understanding and using abstract ideas and concepts, P2 students may find it very difficult.

Helping students prepare for the development of HOT skills was the focus identified in the three-year plan of Tsuen Wan Government Primary School. To work on this focus, the English panel head and P2 English teachers explored how to design tasks to prepare their students for the development of HOT skills and what appropriate resources to use. They studied the Bloom's taxonomy and its revised version (Allyn & Bacon, 1984). After considering the specific stage of cognitive development of P2 students, they placed emphasis on not only "remembering" and "understanding" but also "application" of knowledge using a very authentic context in the unit "At the Shopping Centre".

### Level

P2

### Strategies used

#### 1. Designing tasks with progressive cognitive levels to support students' thinking from the concrete to the abstract

Teachers designed tasks carefully with progressive cognitive demands on P2 students. First, students were given a directory of a shopping centre with very simple information such as names of goods and shops to learn. They were then asked to complete the task of "choosing a birthday present for a classmate".

In completing the assigned task, students were guided to share their feelings, give reasons for choosing the presents and reflect on their shopping experience. More able students were then asked to think of ways to improve the design of a real shopping centre (City Walk) and work out a new floor plan. Such gradual progression from the concrete to the abstract in the task design helped scaffold students' learning of basic thinking skills and support their development of HOT skills in the future.




#### 2. Using authentic tasks closely related to P2 students' personal experience and daily life

Students were given a very authentic context to learn English. Instead of using the sample shopping directory and very controlled tasks in the textbook, they paid a visit to City Walk Shopping Centre in the same district as an extended task. They also read authentic materials such as the directory and the floor plan of City Walk before the visit and had to look for the presents they wanted to buy. In the process, they could easily relate their learning to daily life and apply the knowledge learned to real-life experience.

### 3. Providing ample opportunity for students' experiential learning and learning by doing

As young children can handle concrete ideas well, experiential learning was provided for P2 students. Such learning by doing in the process has helped deepen their understanding of the knowledge learned and enabled them to apply their knowledge in daily life. With real experience to undergo such as considering the possible presents to buy for their classmates and their prices in a real shopping centre, students found the task more purposeful and interesting.

## What happened

<p><b>Reading task:</b> After learning the vocabulary and studying the floor plan of a shopping centre in the textbook, students were required to read and study the directory of City Walk Shopping Centre.</p>	
<p><b>Speaking tasks:</b> Students were required to report their City Walk shopping experience to their classmates on what present they chose, why the present was chosen and where they bought it.</p>	
<p><b>Writing tasks:</b> Students were required to answer questions related to their City Walk shopping experience and to explain why or why not they enjoyed their shopping experience. Students of higher ability were required to design a new floor plan for the shopping centre.</p>	

## Difficulties and suggestions

It was not easy to introduce authentic tasks in P2's language activities. Teachers reported that they had to spend a lot of time to get students prepared for the authentic tasks. Some students reported that the authentic directory and floor plan of the shopping centre were too different from the sample directory in the textbook. They could not find the shops they want. Many students lacked the vocabulary and the language to express themselves in the speaking tasks. Most students also had difficulties answering the questions in the writing task.

To help students complete the reading task, supplementary worksheets were set to illustrate the floor plan design of the shopping centre. To help students complete the speaking and writing tasks, some new sentence patterns and the simple past tense were taught. Teachers also helped students with the vocabulary in elaborating ideas.

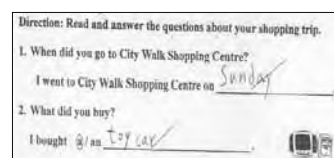
Supplementary worksheets to help students understand the floor plan of City Walk Shopping Centre.



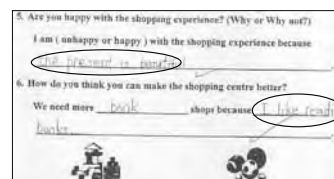
Sentence patterns of the speaking tasks were given in the extended worksheets to help students talk about what present they chose and where they bought it (in present tense).



P2 students in the school had not been introduced to the use of past tense. The verbs in the guided questions were changed into past tense to help students complete the writing tasks.



Many students' explanations to "why they chose the present" and "how to make the shopping centre better" were unsatisfactory. Teachers then helped students to elaborate their ideas.



What makes your shopping experience good?

- I can choose a present
- the shops are easy to find
- the present is cheap

What makes your shopping experience bad?

- I cannot choose a present
- I cannot find the shops I want
- the presents are very expensive



Teachers helped students to elaborate their ideas

How can you make the shopping centre better?

I think there should be more toy shops because most students like to have toys for their birthday presents.



Improved students' performance after having feedback from teachers

Although more teachers' input was required in the speaking and writing tasks than expected, it was found that students' level of participation in the tasks was very high. As the task design was authentic and related to an immediate problem to be solved, students were keen to acquire the language and to complete the tasks.



## What teachers and students think

Interviews on both students and teachers were conducted at the end of the first school term to find out the effectiveness of using authentic tasks to help stretch students' thinking skills. Almost all the students agreed that the authentic tasks motivated them much better in task completion. They agreed that they were much more actively involved in the thinking process when they were given the choice to "choose the present" for a real friend. They enjoyed the speaking activities most.

The teachers agreed that authentic tasks could help stretch students' thinking skills by urging them to apply the knowledge they learned in the textbook to solve problems in their daily life. Students were better motivated to use the vocabulary and language to communicate ideas and to complete the tasks. Although the teachers' intervention and feedback took more lesson time, they thought that it was worth trying more authentic tasks to help junior primary students stretch their thinking skills.

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**Tsuen Wan Government Primary School**  
**Anne CHAN (Language Support Officer)**