Challenge 3 : Building bridges for the smooth implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language curriculum

Overview

The New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language curriculum has been implemented for almost two years. Yet, it still poses a challenge to teachers. It is high time to critically review the progress made so that teachers can identify specific areas for improvement. Two important questions for teachers to reflect on are: What are the challenges for teachers in implementing the NSS English Language curriculum at this initial stage? How can they meet those challenges?

Since the implementation of this new curriculum in September 2009, teachers have focussed more on practical issues such as the actual time required for delivering the Core and Elective Parts, the use of different textbooks, the requirements of the HKDSE, etc. In general, there are two major challenges to be overcome in order for teachers to implement it more smoothly in the future.

Two major challenges for teachers

1. **Bridging the gap between individual students' language abilities and the demands of the NSS English Language curriculum**
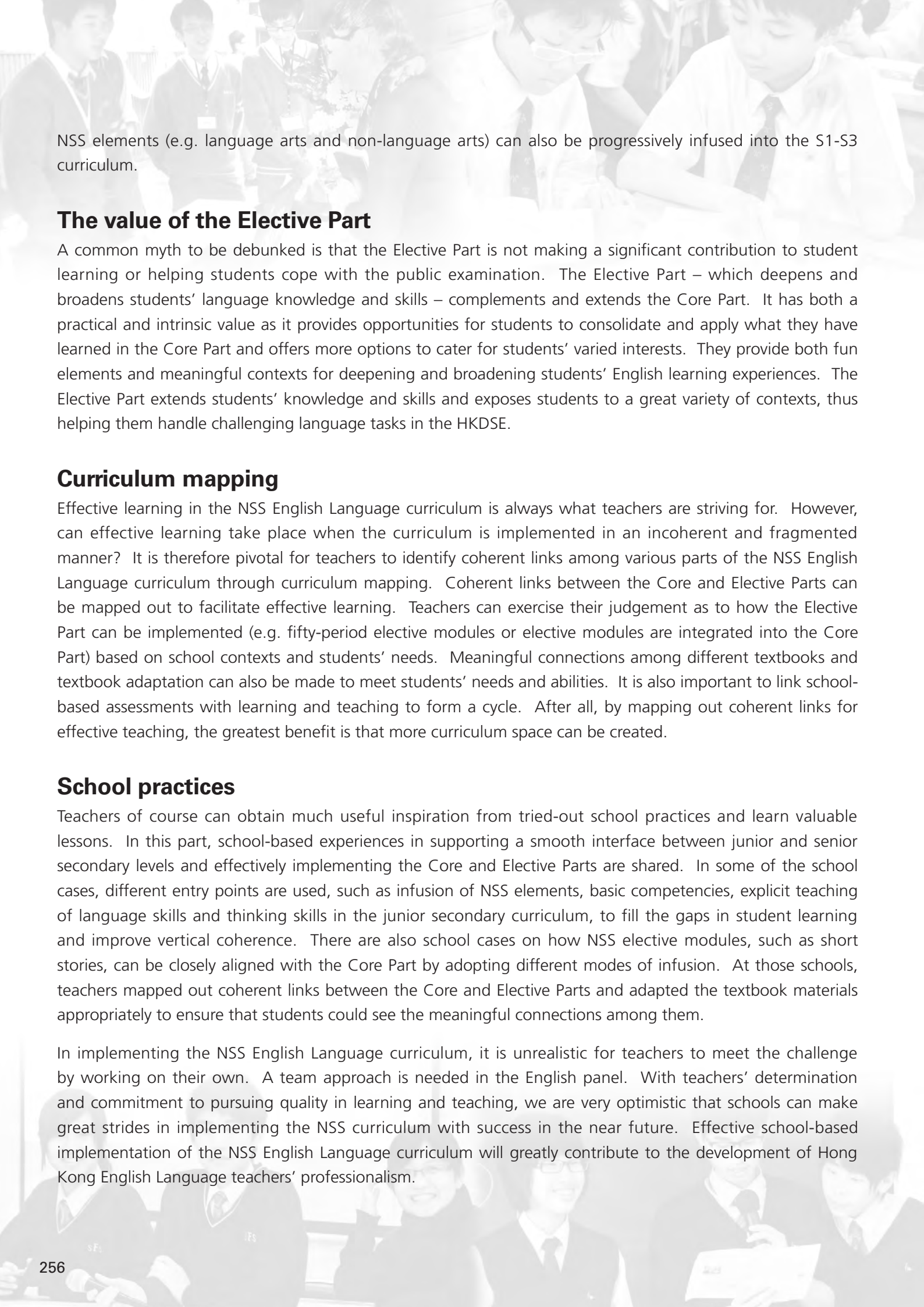
   Teachers have observed that students find it difficult to meet the language and cognitive demands of the NSS English Language curriculum. To help students cope with such demands, teachers see a pressing need to develop their essential knowledge and skills. However, with about 30% of them not having attained the basic competencies in the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA), much attention has to be directed to supporting less proficient students and also average students who have difficulty in catching up with the curriculum. Such a gap implies that much effort has to be made to address learner diversity and scaffold student learning to help them meet the requirements of the HKDSE.

2. **Making coherent links between the Core and Elective Parts**

   The NSS English Language curriculum consists of the Core and Elective Parts to provide both core and extension modules to meet students' varied needs and interests. Because of this design, teachers have a tendency to treat them as two separate entities while delivering them. However, the consequences of not making coherent links (e.g. themes, essential knowledge and skills and text types) between the Core and Elective Parts are that the school-based English Language curriculum may become fragmented and too incoherent for students' effective learning and that the two unrelated parts may cost teachers more teaching time, which they have already seen as insufficient.

Building stronger bridges

How do teachers build stronger bridges to support the smoother implementation of the NSS English Language curriculum in the future? How do they help students who are having difficulty in meeting its demands? A good starting point would be to conduct a curriculum review in S1-S3 to identify the gaps in student learning in order to improve vertical continuity. Teachers can make use of such tools as the Learning Progression Framework, basic competencies, language sub-skills and values and attitudes suggested in the Curriculum Guide, TSA results, internal assessments, formative assessments, students' work, etc. to identify gaps between students' current performance and the requirements of the HKDSE. To support a smooth interface,

NSS elements (e.g. language arts and non-language arts) can also be progressively infused into the S1-S3 curriculum.

The value of the Elective Part

A common myth to be debunked is that the Elective Part is not making a significant contribution to student learning or helping students cope with the public examination. The Elective Part – which deepens and broadens students' language knowledge and skills – complements and extends the Core Part. It has both a practical and intrinsic value as it provides opportunities for students to consolidate and apply what they have learned in the Core Part and offers more options to cater for students' varied interests. They provide both fun elements and meaningful contexts for deepening and broadening students' English learning experiences. The Elective Part extends students' knowledge and skills and exposes students to a great variety of contexts, thus helping them handle challenging language tasks in the HKDSE.

Curriculum mapping

Effective learning in the NSS English Language curriculum is always what teachers are striving for. However, can effective learning take place when the curriculum is implemented in an incoherent and fragmented manner? It is therefore pivotal for teachers to identify coherent links among various parts of the NSS English Language curriculum through curriculum mapping. Coherent links between the Core and Elective Parts can be mapped out to facilitate effective learning. Teachers can exercise their judgement as to how the Elective Part can be implemented (e.g. fifty-period elective modules or elective modules are integrated into the Core Part) based on school contexts and students' needs. Meaningful connections among different textbooks and textbook adaptation can also be made to meet students' needs and abilities. It is also important to link school-based assessments with learning and teaching to form a cycle. After all, by mapping out coherent links for effective teaching, the greatest benefit is that more curriculum space can be created.

School practices

Teachers of course can obtain much useful inspiration from tried-out school practices and learn valuable lessons. In this part, school-based experiences in supporting a smooth interface between junior and senior secondary levels and effectively implementing the Core and Elective Parts are shared. In some of the school cases, different entry points are used, such as infusion of NSS elements, basic competencies, explicit teaching of language skills and thinking skills in the junior secondary curriculum, to fill the gaps in student learning and improve vertical coherence. There are also school cases on how NSS elective modules, such as short stories, can be closely aligned with the Core Part by adopting different modes of infusion. At those schools, teachers mapped out coherent links between the Core and Elective Parts and adapted the textbook materials appropriately to ensure that students could see the meaningful connections among them.

In implementing the NSS English Language curriculum, it is unrealistic for teachers to meet the challenge by working on their own. A team approach is needed in the English panel. With teachers' determination and commitment to pursuing quality in learning and teaching, we are very optimistic that schools can make great strides in implementing the NSS curriculum with success in the near future. Effective school-based implementation of the NSS English Language curriculum will greatly contribute to the development of Hong Kong English Language teachers' professionalism.

Reworking the S3 Enhancement Programme to prepare students for the NSS curriculum

Background

Now that the NSS curriculum is being implemented, many teachers are finding that there is great pressure on their teaching time in the senior forms. There are so many things to cover, and so little time in which to do it. In order to relieve some of the pressure and create more teaching space in S4-6, many schools are introducing elements of the NSS curriculum in S1-3. Students can learn basic concepts related to the elective modules and also strengthen basic language skills in preparation for the senior forms.

At Buddhist Kok Kwong Secondary School, an Enhancement Programme (EP) is implemented in S1-3 alongside the regular English lessons. The material used in the programme is school-based, and it can be taught by the same or by a different teacher. Two lessons per cycle are given to the Enhancement Programme. Its aims are as follows:

- to fill gaps in students' knowledge by providing training in reading skills and phonics
- to enhance students' motivation by the inclusion of language arts elements and activities
- to allow teachers to teach according to their expertise and experience

In the light of new curriculum developments and students' needs, in 2009-2010 teachers decided to revise the EP materials to create better coherence with the textbook-based lessons and better preparation for work in the senior forms by integrating elements of the NSS elective modules and by strengthening work on language skills, especially reading. Since the materials for S1 and S2 had already been substantially revised, it was decided to focus on the materials for S3 initially.

Level

S3

Strategies used

Need identified	Strategy used
Many students have a weak foundation in basic language skills, particularly reading.	• Integrate the explicit teaching of reading strategies into the EP. • Align reading strategies taught in the EP with those in the textbook. • Give students more opportunities to practise speaking and listening through language arts activities such as drama games and listening to songs. • Provide more scaffolding for writing tasks.
Students need reinforcement of vocabulary and grammar learning.	• Align the EP more closely with the textbook, so that students can have more opportunities to apply vocabulary sets and language patterns from the textbook-based lessons.
Some students lack motivation to learn English and find the subject intimidating.	• Integrate language arts texts and activities, such as poems, songs, films and drama scripts, into the EP to prepare students for the language arts elective modules of the NSS and to introduce important skills and concepts for the School-based Assessment.

What happened

Comparison of the old and new S3 programmes

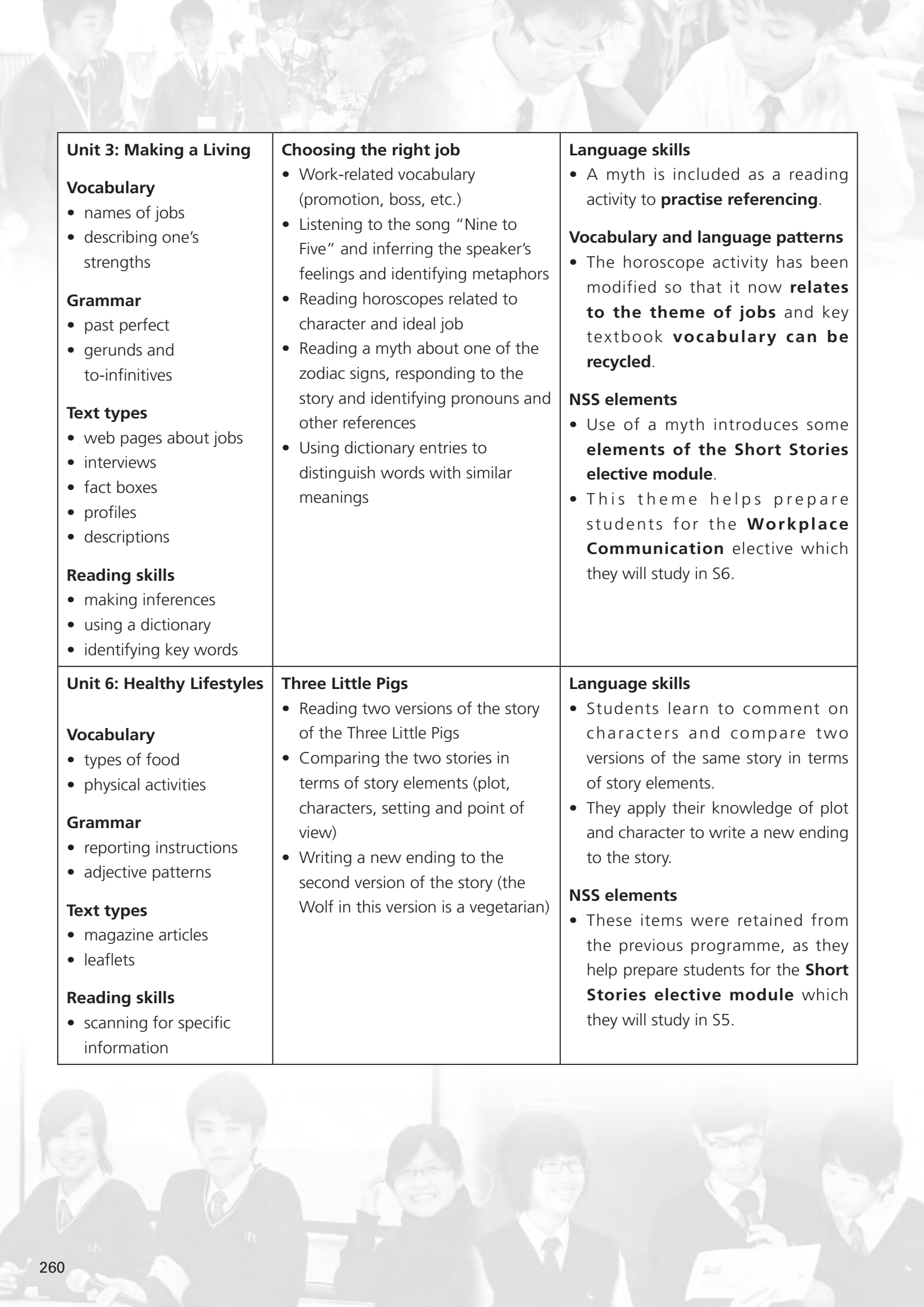**1. Features of the old S3 Enhancement Programme**

	Good point	Common problem
Language skills	• There is a focus on reading skills.	• There is sometimes a mismatch between the questions set and the stated objectives in terms of teaching reading skills. • There is not enough scaffolding for some writing and speaking tasks.
Vocabulary and language patterns	• The programme addresses gaps in students' vocabulary learning and phonics knowledge.	• There is a lack of alignment with the textbook themes and therefore little opportunity for applying vocabulary learned.
Integration of language arts materials and NSS elements	• A wide variety of language arts texts are used in the programme, including non-print material such as movies. These enhance students' motivation.	• Language arts texts (e.g. poems and songs) are mainly used for comprehension and gap-fill activities. There is little opportunity for response.

Mapping of the S3 textbook-based curriculum and the contents of the EP was carried out. A plan for development of reading strategies from S1 to S3 was devised and the relevant strategies for S3 were integrated into the EP plan. Elements of the NSS elective modules were also integrated to create a smooth transition to the NSS.

2. Revised content and activities mapped with textbook themes and reading strategies

Textbook (TB) unit content	EP content	Improvement made
Unit 1: Hobbies **Vocabulary** • vocabulary for hobbies • suffixes **Text type** • magazine articles **Reading skills** • skimming • scanning • inferring meaning of unknown words from the context	**Teen Magazines** • Types of magazines related to hobbies and interests • Scanning covers to predict content • Scanning contents pages to find specific information • Scanning magazine advertisements for specific information • Skimming newspaper reports for general idea of the topic • Article on comic book collecting: Strategies for inferring the meaning of unknown words from the context • Task: Design and present a magazine cover	**Language skills** • Practice in reading strategies **follows the textbook theme** and **echoes the strategies taught in textbook-based lessons**. • There are **models and scaffolding** for the final task. **Vocabulary and language patterns** • Vocabulary from the textbook (hobbies) can be **recycled**. **NSS elements** • Use of magazine texts creates links to the **Popular Culture elective module**.

Unit 2: Teen Problems	Drama	Language skills
Vocabulary • describing personality • synonyms **Text types** • informal letters • advice letter **Reading skills** • identifying main ideas • skimming, scanning • using cohesive devices (pronouns)	• Vocabulary for describing feelings • Reading aloud a dialogue with expression • Reading a drama script and making inferences about the characters • Drama games: showing emotions and making inferences	• The scripts are used to **practise reading strategies**. • There are drama games to enhance students' speaking skills. **Vocabulary and language patterns** • The drama scripts used have a **common theme** of teen problems, so vocabulary taught in the textbook unit, such as words to describe characters, can be **recycled**. **NSS elements** • By exposing them to drama texts and providing opportunities to practise skills such as reading with expression, the module can help **prepare students for the Drama elective** which they will study in S4.
Unit 4: Charity **Vocabulary** • fundraising events • antonyms **Text types** • poster for fundraising events • flyers • heading from web pages **Reading skills** • scanning • evaluating	**Listening to poems and songs** • Song "We are the World" – understanding the main idea • Song "So Sick" – inferring speaker's feelings and understanding metaphors • Poem "The Flag Seller" – making inferences, understanding similes and metaphors	**Language skills** • The songs are used to **practise reading skills** and to help students understand the use of **figurative language**. **Vocabulary and language patterns** • The songs and poem used are **related to the theme** of charity. **NSS elements** • Exposure to **poems and songs** is important preparation for the Territory-wide System Assessment and the NSS curriculum. Although students do not study the Poems and Songs elective module, they may encounter these text types in the reading paper.

Unit 3: Making a Living **Vocabulary** • names of jobs • describing one's strengths **Grammar** • past perfect • gerunds and to-infinitives **Text types** • web pages about jobs • interviews • fact boxes • profiles • descriptions **Reading skills** • making inferences • using a dictionary • identifying key words	**Choosing the right job** • Work-related vocabulary (promotion, boss, etc.) • Listening to the song "Nine to Five" and inferring the speaker's feelings and identifying metaphors • Reading horoscopes related to character and ideal job • Reading a myth about one of the zodiac signs, responding to the story and identifying pronouns and other references • Using dictionary entries to distinguish words with similar meanings	**Language skills** • A myth is included as a reading activity to **practise referencing**. **Vocabulary and language patterns** • The horoscope activity has been modified so that it now **relates to the theme of jobs** and key textbook **vocabulary can be recycled**. **NSS elements** • Use of a myth introduces some **elements of the Short Stories elective module**. • This theme helps prepare students for the **Workplace Communication** elective which they will study in S6.
Unit 6: Healthy Lifestyles **Vocabulary** • types of food • physical activities **Grammar** • reporting instructions • adjective patterns **Text types** • magazine articles • leaflets **Reading skills** • scanning for specific information	**Three Little Pigs** • Reading two versions of the story of the Three Little Pigs • Comparing the two stories in terms of story elements (plot, characters, setting and point of view) • Writing a new ending to the second version of the story (the Wolf in this version is a vegetarian)	**Language skills** • Students learn to comment on characters and compare two versions of the same story in terms of story elements. • They apply their knowledge of plot and character to write a new ending to the story. **NSS elements** • These items were retained from the previous programme, as they help prepare students for the **Short Stories elective module** which they will study in S5.

Unit 5: On the Box	Responding to movies	Language skills
Vocabulary • types of TV programmes • adjectives to describe them **Text types** • magazine articles about TV shows **Reading skills** • scanning for specific information • deducing meaning of unknown words from context	• Vocabulary connected with movies, including genre • Reading a movie review and distinguishing between facts and opinions • Watching a movie and responding to the characters, giving evidence to support opinions • Writing a movie review • Giving an oral presentation about their favourite film	• Students have a **model for writing** their movie review. • They learn how to identify a writer's opinions in a review and also how to express their own opinions of a character. **Vocabulary and language patterns** • Students learn some phrases for **giving and supporting opinions**. • They review adjectives for describing personality. **NSS elements** • Students learn useful skills for School-based Assessment, e.g. discussing characters and giving presentations.
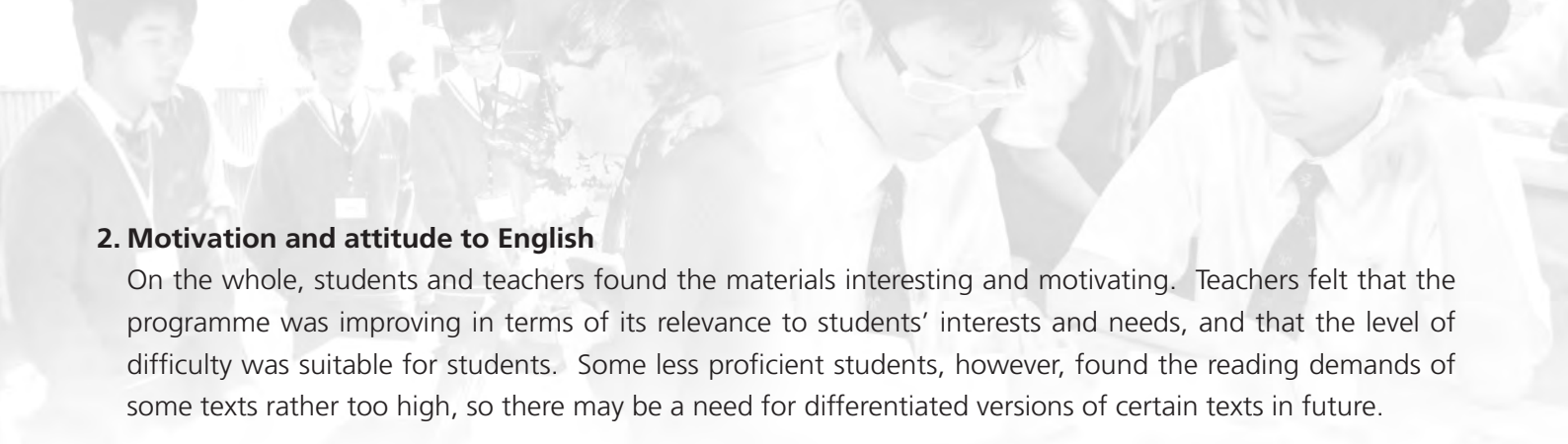
3. Summary of features of the revised programme
- Topics in the EP are linked with the topics in the textbook to promote recycling of vocabulary and opportunities to apply language structures learned.
- Reading strategies are explicitly taught in the EP and applied in the lessons based on the textbook. Other language skills are also developed, and there is a clear link between reading and writing.
- In preparation for the NSS, the programme includes a variety of texts, including language arts (popular culture, poems and songs, drama, short stories) and some non-language arts (workplace communication).
- There is more emphasis on response to themes and characters in texts, and on interpretation and response to poems, songs and stories.
- To help prepare for School-based Assessment, students are encouraged to describe characters in stories and films, and to support their opinions with evidence.

Impact of the revised programme on students' learning

1. Language foundation (language skills, vocabulary and grammar)

80% of students in the more proficient classes felt that the revised materials could help them develop reading skills and 70% said that they were able to apply the reading skills in the lessons. Teachers of both more and less proficient classes felt that the alignment of the EP with the textbook-based lessons helped consolidate students' knowledge. They commented that students had more confidence in using vocabulary in the EP lessons which they had already encountered in their regular English lessons.

2. Motivation and attitude to English

On the whole, students and teachers found the materials interesting and motivating. Teachers felt that the programme was improving in terms of its relevance to students' interests and needs, and that the level of difficulty was suitable for students. Some less proficient students, however, found the reading demands of some texts rather too high, so there may be a need for differentiated versions of certain texts in future.

All students found the language arts materials, such as songs, movies and drama, the most interesting and motivating. They also enjoyed the games and activities included in the programme. Since students study the Drama elective module in S4, their positive response is an encouraging indicator of their future performance in that module.
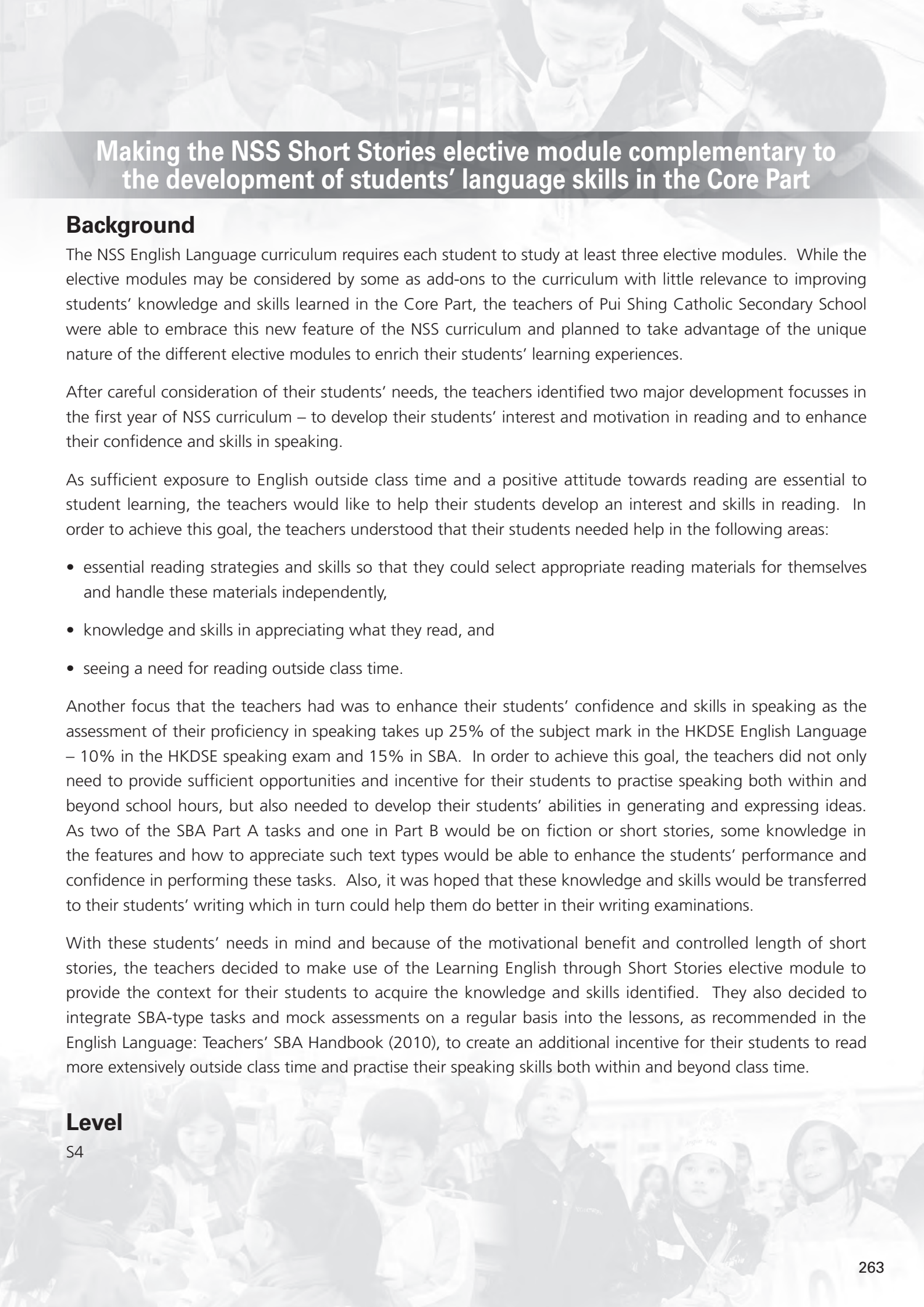
Facilitating factors

- A small group of teachers is responsible for planning and designing the programme and materials for the EP. The EP coordinator for S3 is a member of the group. Working closely together enables teachers to develop their skills in curriculum and materials design and to get thoughtful feedback on their work.
- Careful mapping of the existing EP materials and the textbook focusses in terms of theme, vocabulary and reading skills allowed for improved planning and better cohesion between the two programmes.
- Teachers in the curriculum planning group are already familiar with reading skills and have some knowledge of how to plan activities to develop them.
- There are regular meetings with teachers from each year group to receive feedback on students' response to the materials, so that further modifications can be made to meet students' needs.

Difficulties and suggestions

- The phonics aspect of the EP remains largely unchanged and the teaching is conducted separately. More measures could be taken to provide students with opportunities to apply their understanding of phonics in the textbook-based lessons.
- There is a greater need to cater for learner diversity by the provision of differentiated texts, further scaffolding for weaker students, and by designating some activities as extension for the more proficient students.
- As teachers' expertise in the area of language arts develops, it should be possible to integrate more language arts activities into the main English programme, with an ultimate goal of merging the two programmes together.

Buddhist Kok Kwong Secondary School
Bridget IP (Language Support Officer)

Making the NSS Short Stories elective module complementary to the development of students' language skills in the Core Part

Background

The NSS English Language curriculum requires each student to study at least three elective modules. While the elective modules may be considered by some as add-ons to the curriculum with little relevance to improving students' knowledge and skills learned in the Core Part, the teachers of Pui Shing Catholic Secondary School were able to embrace this new feature of the NSS curriculum and planned to take advantage of the unique nature of the different elective modules to enrich their students' learning experiences.

After careful consideration of their students' needs, the teachers identified two major development focusses in the first year of NSS curriculum – to develop their students' interest and motivation in reading and to enhance their confidence and skills in speaking.

As sufficient exposure to English outside class time and a positive attitude towards reading are essential to student learning, the teachers would like to help their students develop an interest and skills in reading. In order to achieve this goal, the teachers understood that their students needed help in the following areas:

- essential reading strategies and skills so that they could select appropriate reading materials for themselves and handle these materials independently,

- knowledge and skills in appreciating what they read, and

- seeing a need for reading outside class time.

Another focus that the teachers had was to enhance their students' confidence and skills in speaking as the assessment of their proficiency in speaking takes up 25% of the subject mark in the HKDSE English Language – 10% in the HKDSE speaking exam and 15% in SBA. In order to achieve this goal, the teachers did not only need to provide sufficient opportunities and incentive for their students to practise speaking both within and beyond school hours, but also needed to develop their students' abilities in generating and expressing ideas. As two of the SBA Part A tasks and one in Part B would be on fiction or short stories, some knowledge in the features and how to appreciate such text types would be able to enhance the students' performance and confidence in performing these tasks. Also, it was hoped that these knowledge and skills would be transferred to their students' writing which in turn could help them do better in their writing examinations.

With these students' needs in mind and because of the motivational benefit and controlled length of short stories, the teachers decided to make use of the Learning English through Short Stories elective module to provide the context for their students to acquire the knowledge and skills identified. They also decided to integrate SBA-type tasks and mock assessments on a regular basis into the lessons, as recommended in the English Language: Teachers' SBA Handbook (2010), to create an additional incentive for their students to read more extensively outside class time and practise their speaking skills both within and beyond class time.

Level

S4

Strategies used

Need identified	Strategy used
Students lack motivation in reading English fiction because: a. many of them are overwhelmed by the length of fiction books in English; b. some students have not mastered the skills in choosing appropriate books for themselves; and/or c. there is a mismatch between the students' intellectual development level and their English reading level, which makes it a challenge for them to find appropriate reading materials.	• Introduce and provide opportunities for students to practise their extensive reading skills and strategies • Make use of short stories that appeal to students in lessons for: 　a. introducing essential reading and appreciation skills; and 　b. developing students' skills in using the reading journal • Ensure easy access to fiction in the form of a short stories anthology that is of appropriate reading ability level and interest of students for independent reading
Many students have a weak foundation in basic language skills, especially in reading.	• Integrate the explicit teaching of intensive and extensive reading skills and strategies into the Short Stories elective module whenever appropriate • Supply opportunities for students to apply the reading strategies taught in the Core Part • Provide more scaffolding for the speaking and writing tasks
Many students lack confidence in speaking to an audience.	• Present students with more opportunities to practise speaking during lessons with and in front of their peers • Make speaking tasks manageable for students by providing clear successful criteria
Students lack the language and vocabulary to talk or write about movies and stories.	• Equip students with a bank of vocabulary and useful expressions essential for discussing or writing about a specific aspect of a fiction • Provide opportunities for students to practise using the new vocabulary and expressions in their speaking and writing tasks • Reward students' effort in applying the new vocabulary and expressions in their speaking and writing tasks
Students spend most of the time describing the plot of a fiction rather than tailoring their answers or responses according to the questions set in their SBA or writing tasks.	• Show students how to summarise a story effectively • Introduce key features and techniques commonly used in short stories to enhance their ability in appreciating and conducting an informed discussion about works of fiction
Many students have difficulties in retaining the correct pronunciation and spelling of the newly acquired words.	• Make recording of the pronunciation of new words and expressions available in the e-class for students' practice outside class time • Conduct dictations of the new words regularly • Award bonus marks in writing tasks for accuracy in spelling

Need identified	Strategy used
Students are passive in their learning and some of them do not treat the speaking tasks in class seriously enough.	• Make use of formative assessment to develop students' ownership in their learning: a. inform students about the learning objectives and what they can do to facilitate their own learning in the module at the very beginning b. encourage students to reflect on their learning through self-assessment and evaluation c. arrange very focussed on-going speaking assessments regularly throughout the module d. let students know the focusses and the success criteria of each speaking assessment so that they can prepare accordingly • Provide opportunities for students to exercise autonomy by allowing them to choose: a. the number of formative assessments they would like to take within the period of the module b. the stories, either from their short stories anthology or any other fictions of their choice, for these assessments

In-class speaking assessment for learning

No.	When	What about	Focus
1	1st lesson after completing lessons on WS3	Introducing a book Ss chose from the library: 1. its genre 2. reasons they are interested in it.	1. **Organisation**: using appropriate signposting words for organizing ideas (WS3 pg. 4) 2. **Communication strategies** listed in the self-evaluation form on WS3 Pg. 5
2 & 3	After lesson on popular fairy tales	Introducing their favourite fairy tale/fractured fairy tale in their Short Stories Anthology	1. **Word choice**: making use of the new vocabulary acquired a. story types b. adjectives describing how they feel about a story/movie 2. **Organisation**: using appropriate signposting words for organizing ideas 3. **Communication strategies**
4	After lesson on the Wolf's Tale	Introducing their favourite fairy tale/fractured fairy tale from	1. **Content**: commenting on an interesting feature (e.g. point of view/twist) in the story

Information concerning the focusses of the on-going speaking assessments provided to students at the beginning of the module

What happened:

Module introduction & goal setting

Main task: Students completed and shared their learning contract about the actions they planned to take to help themselves achieve the learning objectives of the module.

Target knowledge, skills & attitudes

Values & Attitudes:

1. Understand the aims, design and content of their school-based NSS Short Stories elective module
2. Understand how this school-based program will help them acquire skills needed in SBA and the HKDSE papers in reading, speaking and writing
3. Develop self-monitoring and self-help strategies to achieve the learning objectives of the module

Contents — SBA (Part A: Fiction) (Part B: Short Stories)

In the module, you will
1. read different kinds of short stories both in class and...
2. gain under... good write...
3. get a lot of... writing
4. learn a lot... expression...

HKDSE Paper 2
Part B (15% of the subject mark)
Write about 400 words on any ONE...
Learning English through Short...
Your parents have sent you away f... writing course in a summer retreat islands. After several days, you fin...

Describe
- experience of creative writing course (similar to what happens in the module)

1.3 Assessments
Below is how you are going to be assessed:
1. Your score in the speaking paper will include:
   a. your in-class individual presentations and/or group interactions (30%), AND
   b. the speaking exam (50%).
   ** Total mark in speaking equals (a + b) x 1.25
2. Your performance in the writing you do in this module will form part of the writing term mark.
3. The score...
4. Your Read...

By pledge...

Put your plan here.
Sign here.

Ask someone who can encourage you to sign here & write down who he/she is.

2.3.1 Words & phrases to describe books

Here are some words you can use when talking about books you've read:

☺ exciting   moving   funny/*hilarious
*thought-provoking   full of surprises   suspenseful
well-written   *heartwarming   imaginative

☹ predicto

unreaso

2.3.2 Favourite type of stories

This is how you can talk about your favourite type of stories:

My favourite type of stories /The kind of stories I like best is _____. I think they are really _____ because _____. _____ books is _____. If _____ why I like this type

Teacher introducing strategies for students to choose the right books for themselves

A student introducing a fiction to their peers in class

Short stories appreciation and understanding key features: Fractured fairy tales

Main task: Students presented and wrote their group's fractured fairy tale from the point of view of a character in their story.

Target knowledge, skills & attitudes

Reading:
1. Identify keywords to help make predictions
2. Make use of prior knowledge in predicting the plot
3. Infer word meaning from context

SBA/Speaking:
4. Start and end a discussion with appropriate formulaic expressions
5. Participate in and initiate interaction by making suggestions, supporting and developing others' views, disagreeing and offering alternatives
6. Sustain and extend a conversational exchange

Short stories:
7. Identify:
   a. the setting & characters of stories
   b. common features in fairy tales
   c. points of view & their impact on a story
8. Write a short story with:
   a. an awareness of the plot elements & the impact the point of view chosen has on it
   b. a twist to surprise the readers

Vocabulary:
9. Name the key elements in stories
10. Suggest common settings & characters in fairy tales

Different story types & extensive reading skills

Main task: Students chose a book from the library and conducted a presentation to explain the features and reasons that made it attractive to them.

Target knowledge, skills & attitudes

Short stories & SBA/Speaking:
1. Identify genres of short stories/fiction
2. Share experiences & preferences in reading
3. Provide supporting reasons for an opinion
4. Improve communication strategies (e.g. eye-contact, loud & clear voice, etc.)

Vocabulary:
5. Name different story types
6. Describe feelings about a story/book using adjectives and phrases

Extensive reading:
7. Locate information from different parts of books to make informed book choice
8. Choose a book of appropriate interest and reading level for independent reading

Attitude:
9. Develop a reading habit

5.5 Writing your own fractured fairy tale

5.5.1 You and your group members are going to write a fractured fairy tale. Discuss and plan your group's story and complete the table in Part 5.5.2. You may talk about:
- which original fairy tale to base your story on.
- which story elements (for example, setting, characters, plot, point of view, ending, etc.) your group would like to change, and
- any
Refer to t
discussion

Expressions for discussion:
1. Beginning the discussion
   - Let's start our discussion.
   - Shall we start?
   - Today we have to talk about / discuss ...
2. Giving suggestions
   - I suggest ...
   - I think we should / can ...
   - * Why don't we ... ?

5.5.3 Self-evaluation – Group discussion

1.	I spoke loudly during the discussion.	1	4	6	10
2.	I always gave examples to support my ideas.	1	4	6	10
3.	I always quoted from what my group mates said when I told them I agreed with them.	1	4	6	10
4.	I used some good vocabulary and read them all out correctly during the discussion.	1	4	6	10
5.	I always looked at my group mates when I was speaking to them.	1	4	6	10
	Total				/50

d how I can do better next
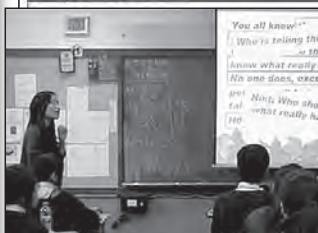
Teacher drawing students' focus on using keywords to help make predictions

A student presenting her group's fractured fairy tale

7.1 Characterisation
7.1.1 Adjectives describing characters
How many of the following adjectives about people do you know? Some are good and some of them are bad qualities of people. Try to put them into boxes below.
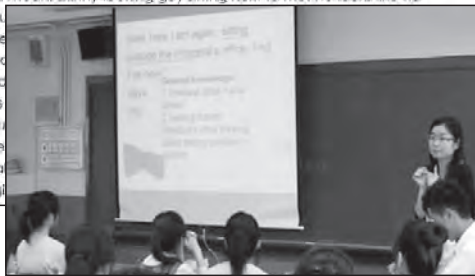
caring	helpful	brave	selfish	unselfi...
friendly	generous	kind	thoughtful	optim...
me...				

Good personalities	Bad perso...

7.1.3 Characterisation in *Pink Bow Tie*
Read the following sentences and decide which method of characterisation the writer uses to create the characters in the story. Write the letter in the blanks provided.

> a. the character's appearance.
> b. his/her action.
> c. the things he/she said,
> d. what other characters said about him/her, and
> e. what the author said directly about him

1. There is also a mean, skinny-looking guy sitting next to me. He looks like he would cut you...
2. I am a very ne... of the dark. I d...
3. There is an ol... glasses. She is...
4. "What utter n... me to believe...
5. ... she is a rea... she was my gi...

Explicit teaching of inferring word meaning from context

Short stories appreciation and understanding key features: Science fiction

Main task: Students conducted a presentation on their favourite character in a Sci-fi movie.

Target knowledge, skills & attitudes
Reading:
1. Make use of prior knowledge to understand the plot
2. Infer word meaning from context
3. Make predictions
4. Understand the connection between ideas by following pronoun references

Vocabulary:
5. Use vocabulary specific to the science fiction genre

Short stories:
6. Create a setting for a science fiction with HK as the background
7. Be aware of the techniques that writers use to create convincing characters

SBA/Speaking:
8. Sustain and extend conversational exchange by referring to others' ideas when agreeing and disagreeing with them during discussions
9. Present relevant ideas clearly with effective use of a note card
10. Describe details that support a main idea

Short stories appreciation and understanding key features: Horror stories

Main task: Students created and presented their module story.

Target knowledge, skills & attitudes
Reading:
1. Identify the mood of literary work through recognising key words and making inferences

Vocabulary:
2. Describe settings and moods with appropriate adjectives
3. Use vocabulary specific to horror stories
4. Create imagery in a school setting

Short stories & SBA/Speaking:
5. Give a brief summary of a story
6. Recognise tools writers use to create mood:
   a. strong verbs
   b. imagery
   c. dramatic images (similes, metaphors, personification)
7. Express opinions on writer's effectiveness in creating the setting and mood in stories
8. Apply the five senses to describe their classroom
9. Use similes, metaphors and personification in writing descriptions about a place or a person

---

8. Settings and moods

> The **setting** of a story is the time and place where the things in it take place.
> The **mood** is the feeling caused by the "picture" created by the description of the setting.

8.1 Adjectives describing moods
The following adjectives can be used to describe the mood of a story. Are they pleasant or not? Place the adjectives in the right place in this diagram.

| cheerful | tense | welcoming | cold | peaceful |
| calm | depressing | mysterious | friendly | scary |

Pleasant	Unpleasant

11.1 Summarising stories
A good story summary should be short but clear. It is made up of 3 main components of the story: the main character(s), the conflict and the resolution.

	Character	Conflict	Resolution
E.g. *Little Red Riding Hood*	The story is about a girl called Little Red Riding Hood.	She went to visit her sick grandmother but...	At the end, a woodman killed the wolf and...
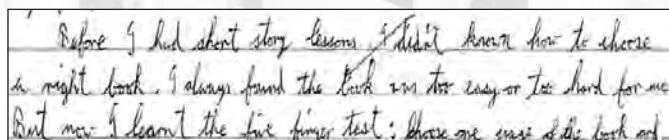
Students expressing their opinion on a story they read in a discussion in class

Impact of the school-based Short Stories module on student learning

• Motivation and attitude to reading
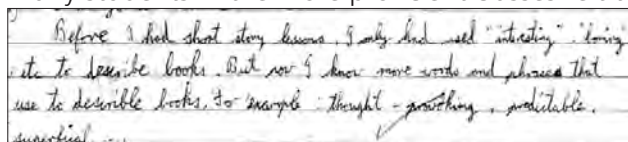
On the whole, the students found the materials interesting and motivating. Some read all the stories in the anthology in just a few days and asked for more

after the teachers briefly highlighted the stories in it. Some students expressed that they felt more confident in choosing appropriate English books to read by themselves.

• Language skills and SBA performances

Many students in the more proficient classes felt that the materials could help them develop their reading skills.
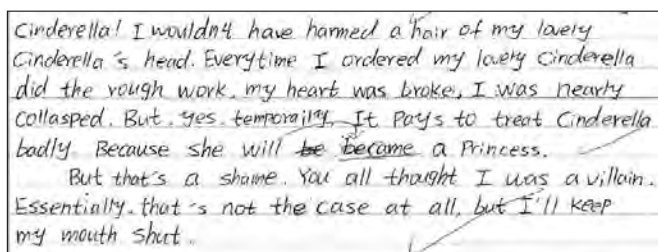
An excerpt from a student's reflection

A lot of students found the materials helpful for them to improve their vocabulary and many believe that they were able to express themselves more adequately with the new vocabulary and phrases introduced in the module.

The teachers also noticed students' improvement in writing stories. In the examination during which students were asked to write a fractured fairy tale, many students were able to demonstrate a clear plot structure and creativity in their stories. More students chose to write their stories from the first person point of view which seldom occurred in their previous stories.

A student's fractured fairy tale written from the first person point of view

Students were able to deliver a presentation of reasonable length about the stories they read in the SBA-type formative assessment tasks. More students showed an improvement in the content of their presentations in which they could give a summary of the story in a few sentences and tailored the rest of their presentations according to the question given to them. Some students were able to make use of the knowledge they gained from the short stories module, such as twists and characterisation, to enrich the content of their presentations and they displayed more confidence in speaking in front of an audience.

Difficulties and suggestions

• The preparation required for designing and implementing the module is very demanding and time-consuming. A more strategic deployment of the core teachers is needed in order to create space for them.

• While the current materials and learning activities can serve the students in the average classes quite well, there is still a need to further revise the materials and the design of the learning activities to better cater for the needs of the less able students. The short stories adopted can be further adapted and more attention is required to make the classroom activities more concise, short and student-centred.

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**Pui Shing Catholic Secondary School
Ada LAM (Language Support Officer)**

Making coherence between the Core and Elective Parts in the NSS English Language curriculum

Background

The implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language curriculum has commenced at S4 since September 2009. One major feature is that it comprises the Core and Elective Parts. In addition to developing students' basic language skills, the NSS curriculum provides more variety and flexibility to cater for their varied interests, needs and abilities.

However, the Core and Elective Parts are not two separate and unrelated components in the NSS curriculum. Educators often think that it is essential to achieve coherence in the curriculum because "lacking such coherence, the curriculum is likely to be little more than a smorgasbord of superficial, abstract, irrelevant, and quickly forgotten pieces" (Toward a Coherent Curriculum, p.4). Such coherence is reinforced by the complementary roles that the Core and the Elective Parts play in the NSS English language curriculum, which are clearly set out:

> "[the elective modules] **focus not so much on the explicit teaching of subject knowledge and skills** (i.e. the four skills, grammar, communicative functions, vocabulary and text-types) **as on providing learners with opportunities to apply them** through following a particular approach or exploring a particular topic which may or may not be covered in the Compulsory Part" (English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide, p.30).

What can teachers do in their curriculum design to help realise such a principle? What possibilities are there in implementing the core and elective modules?

Given the flexibility of the NSS curriculum, schools collaborating with the section have adopted different ways of organising the Core and the Elective Parts, which are illustrated in the following figures:

A. Separation Mode	B. Infusion Mode	C. Extension Mode
• The Core and the Elective Parts are not directly related to each other. • Skills learned in the Core Part can still be applied in the Elective Part. • The Elective Part can be taught in a "block" or scattered throughout a term taking up 1-2 lessons in a cycle.	• Using task-based approach, elective elements are introduced in the tasks. • Grammar and vocabulary is also taught with elective-related materials. • Application of skills is expected when students are completing the tasks. • The elective modules may be partly covered only. Students may re-visit them in other core modules.	• The Elective Part is thematically linked to the core modules and serves to extend students' knowledge on the same theme. • It is closely related to project-based learning where students' exploration of knowledge is emphasised. • The elective modules are inserted at different points in S5 and S6, after the corresponding core units.

This article illustrated the extension mode further with a school example. In this school, the Short Stories elective and the core module share the same theme "Animals". Short stories about animals are chosen for the elective module to extend students' knowledge on the theme.
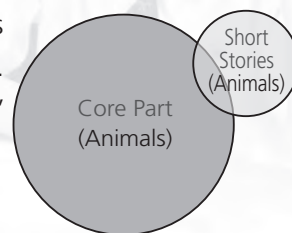
School Background

Many students at this school lack motivation in learning English and most of them have no prior knowledge in the Short Stories elective module. Teachers are aware of the need to make coherence among the various components in the English curriculum. They have had hands-on experience and materials in teaching the elective because they started infusing elements of the short stories elective in S2 in the year 08/09 to promote a smoother interface between the junior and senior secondary.

Level

S5

Strategies used

1. Curriculum design
- The elective serves as an extension to the core unit so that students can extend their knowledge on the theme "Animals" and apply the skills they have learned in the core unit.
- Learning and teaching materials in both the Core and Elective Parts are thematically linked.

2. Module design
- In addition to linking the core and elective modules, coherence is achieved within the module by adopting task-based learning (TBL) approach, which promotes the integration of language skills development, grammar and vocabulary learning, as well as the process writing approach. The SBA component is also infused into the modules.

3. Teaching and learning
- Adaptations have been made to the course book materials in the Core Part to suit students' abilities.
- The elective module starts from the basics because students have no prior knowledge in short stories.
- As students do not have a strong English foundation, there is more careful scaffolding for the tasks, and more motivating materials, like visual aids, are designed to support their learning.
- Tasks are designed to help develop students' generic skills, e.g. creativity, self-learning, collaboration and communication.

4. Assessment
- Various forms of assessment for learning are promoted, such as portfolios, teachers' qualitative feedback using assessment rubrics and peer assessment in presentations and writing.

What happened

1. The Core Part

Task-based approach was adopted in the Core Part and the learning and teaching was organised using the M-U-T (module, unit and task) concept.

Module: Animal & Nature
Unit: Animal Conservation

Pre-task 1	Pre-task 2	Pre-task 3	Pre-task 4
Introducing concepts relating to animals and animal conservation →Vocabulary building →Providing background for the main task	Reading on animal conservation - why and how →Developing reading skills →Distinguishing opinions from facts →Providing ideas for the main task	Listening to a discussion on keeping wild animals as pets →Note-taking →Identifying arguments and supporting details	Watching video clips to evaluate some individual presentations →Analysing text features →Highlighting useful expressions →Discussing presentation skills

Main Tasks

1. Writing a short presentation script, arguing for or against whether wild animals should be kept as pets
2. Giving a one-minute individual presentation based on the script written

2. The Elective Part

The Short Stories elective module provided a context for students to extend and apply knowledge and skills learned in the core. It was thematically linked to the core unit and there were altogether 6 parts:

Part 1   Module Introduction

The **module outline** of the Short Stories elective was introduced to students, along with the **module objectives**. Students were guided to set **learning goals in response to the outline**.
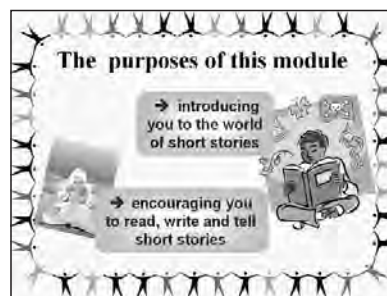
Part 2 The Basics

Different **short stories genres** were introduced to students with a game and a consolidation worksheet. Students also gained a general idea of **short stories elements** such as setting, plot, characters, point of view, etc.

Part 3 Appreciation of Short Stories

Stories that were thematically linked to the core unit were carefully selected to suit students' interests and abilities, to illustrate the targeted literary elements and to expose students to various genres.

Tasks for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages were designed to help students appreciate short stories, identify genre features and apply reading strategies that had been covered in the core and respond to texts. Texts were introduced to students in various ways like shared reading, guided reading, supported reading and independent reading. The ultimate aim was to develop students' interest in reading short stories.

A supported reading activity

Name of Story	Story Genre	Focus
1. The Lion and the Mouse	Fable	• Story plot • Story morals in fables
2. Hachiko	Realistic	• 1st and 3rd person point-of-view • Direct and indirect characterisation • Viewing an issue from various perspectives
3. The Black Velvet Band	Horror	• Twists (I) • Visualisation • Infusing independent reading
4. Beware of the Bears	Humour	• Twists (II) • Encouraging independent reading • Creating tension in stories
5. The Lost Sheep	Parable	• Independent reading
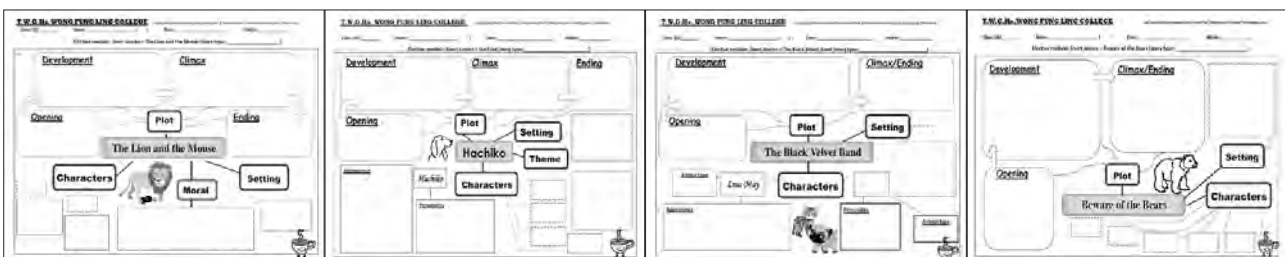
Mind maps for reviewing stories

Part 4   Writing a New Story Ending

In this part, students were asked to write a new story ending to stories at their choice. This gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their creativity. The process writing approach was adopted to make scaffolding easier.

At the pre-writing stage, students analysed their chosen stories and brainstormed ideas on new endings using graphic organisers.
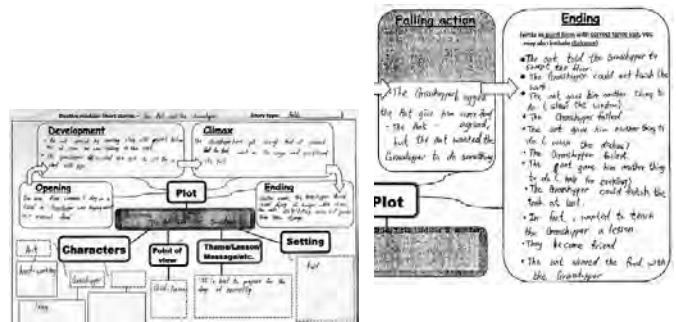
Also, students reviewed useful language items (e.g cohesive devices) and teachers introduced effective strategies for writing stories (e.g. the use of dialogues) to students.

According to their mind maps and various input, students drafted their story endings. Next, in the revising-editing cycle, assessment for learning was the key because students needed constructive feedback to improve their work. Teachers made use of assessment rubrics to inform students of their task performance. A feedback session was then conducted with students to discuss their common errors and ways for improvement. Students also commented on their peers' work and learned from each other using an assessment checklist.

Students' improvement in the final drafts was significant when compared to their first drafts, after sufficient scaffolding and qualitative feedback. Observations include:

- more developed ideas to illustrate themes
- clearer plot structures
- improved paragraphing
- more attempts in using dialogues
- more logical use of cohesive devices to link up ideas

Part 5   Telling a Story

The aim of this part was to give students an opportunity to publicise their work in spoken English. Prior to their presentations, teachers provided students with input on the skills they needed when telling their stories. Students watched sample story-telling video clips, evaluated the storytellers' performance and discussed elements contributing to better and more interesting storytelling presentations. Students' performance was assessed using rubrics and descriptors.

Using visual aids to motivate students

Telling a story - a new story ending

Part 6   Writing a Letter of Advice

Aims:

1. To provide students with an opportunity to recap and reflect on their own learning

2. To familiarise students with the format of public assessment

The process writing approach was again adopted in this task:

> **Situation**
>
> You have received a letter from your cousin Brian who is studying in Shanghai, telling you that he has entered a creative writing competition. He wants your advice because he knows that you have taken a Short Stories course at school. Write a reply to him, giving him some ideas on how he can plan and write a good story. Suggest some good short stories to him and give reasons for your recommendation.

- Analysing the topic
- Brainstorming ideas in groups
- Completing a mind map
- Class reporting

- Revising letter format
- Organising ideas using graphic organisers
- Introducing useful language and expressions for giving advice
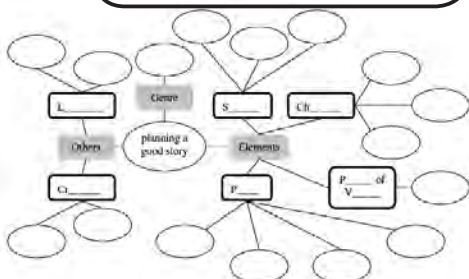
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing

Final Drafts – Demonstrating elective-related knowledge

Relating genres with target readers

Are you writ[ing] for some teenagers? They mostly like to read crime stories, ghost stories, love stories because they love exciting [excitement].

[For] point of view, you can use 1st person or 3rd person to write the short story. But us[ing] 1st person to write ghost and horror stories is suitable since that can make readers more exciting [excited].

Giving advice on the use of "point of view"

In most short stories, the setting include[s] place, time, social conditions and weather conditions. If you do not have a setting, your story can be boring.

Giving advice on "setting"

Recapping knowledge learned about "plot"

Secondly, in most short stories, [there are] an opening, rising actions, a climax and an ending in the plot… In the plot, the climax is the most important.

Impact

Curriculum development

- Better coherence in the curriculum has been achieved with coherent links made among different components in the NSS English Language curriculum, namely the Core and Elective Parts, task-based learning, school-based and external assessments.

- The coherence-making experience has paved the way for future planning and implementation of other elective modules that the school offers. For example, this positive impact is to be sustained in the curriculum design of the Social Issues elective, which will be linked to the Core Part using the infusion mode.

Teachers' development

- Teachers have become more aware of the need of coherence making in the curriculum and how learning and teaching effectiveness is enhanced in this way.
- Teachers' professional growth is significant. They now have a more holistic picture of the curriculum and this in turn helps them identify the gaps and overlaps in course book materials. They are more ready to develop school-based materials to fill such a gap, i.e. to support students with better scaffolding and motivating materials, making learning and teaching less textbook-bound.

Students' performance

- Students can apply their core language skills in reading short stories, writing story endings and letters of advice, listening to story-telling clips and speaking in individual story-telling sessions.
- Students are able to demonstrate their elective-related knowledge and reflect on their own learning in various assessment tasks.

Conclusions and suggestions

- There are many possible ways in implementing the Core and Elective Parts in the NSS curriculum. School contexts should be considered when teachers design the curriculum and making coherence among various components in the curriculum is recommended. For example, after considering their readiness and students' learning needs, teachers from TWGHs Wong Fung Ling College opted for the extension mode because this allows their students to learn from basic and gradually extend and apply their knowledge in the Elective Part. This progression is more beneficial for student learning and manageable for teachers in curriculum planning as well.
- Teachers may also consider creating synergy through linking the Core Part with the Elective Part because the elective modules provide contexts for students to learn, apply and reinforce core knowledge and skills, and it also helps create variety in lessons.
- It is important to conduct curriculum mapping and identify gaps and overlaps in course book materials. Teachers should exercise their professional judgement and make selective use of textbook materials according to school-based needs.
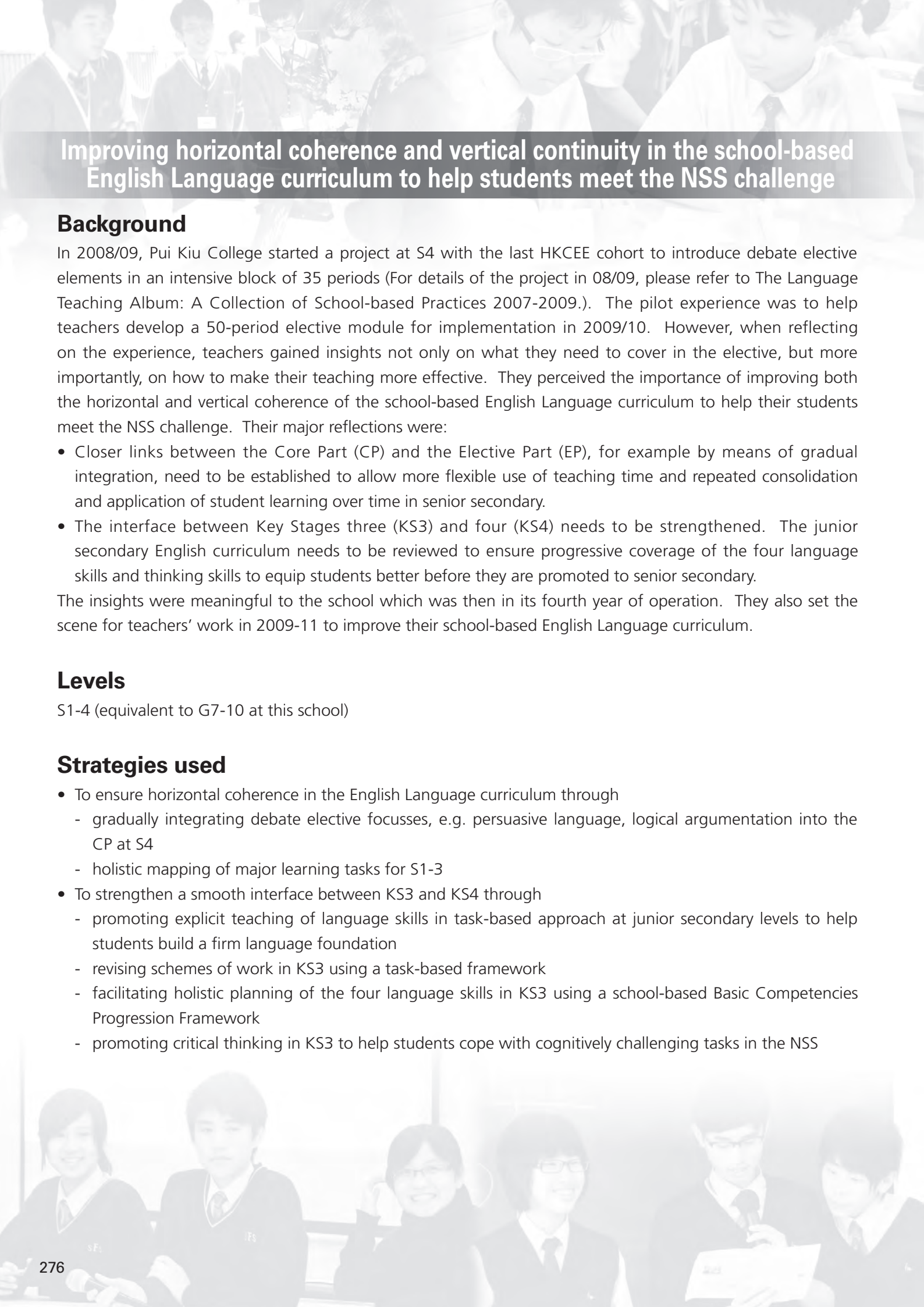
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TWGHs Wong Fung Ling College
Patricia PANG (Language Support Officer)

Improving horizontal coherence and vertical continuity in the school-based English Language curriculum to help students meet the NSS challenge

Background

In 2008/09, Pui Kiu College started a project at S4 with the last HKCEE cohort to introduce debate elective elements in an intensive block of 35 periods (For details of the project in 08/09, please refer to The Language Teaching Album: A Collection of School-based Practices 2007-2009.). The pilot experience was to help teachers develop a 50-period elective module for implementation in 2009/10. However, when reflecting on the experience, teachers gained insights not only on what they need to cover in the elective, but more importantly, on how to make their teaching more effective. They perceived the importance of improving both the horizontal and vertical coherence of the school-based English Language curriculum to help their students meet the NSS challenge. Their major reflections were:

- Closer links between the Core Part (CP) and the Elective Part (EP), for example by means of gradual integration, need to be established to allow more flexible use of teaching time and repeated consolidation and application of student learning over time in senior secondary.
- The interface between Key Stages three (KS3) and four (KS4) needs to be strengthened. The junior secondary English curriculum needs to be reviewed to ensure progressive coverage of the four language skills and thinking skills to equip students better before they are promoted to senior secondary.

The insights were meaningful to the school which was then in its fourth year of operation. They also set the scene for teachers' work in 2009-11 to improve their school-based English Language curriculum.

Levels

S1-4 (equivalent to G7-10 at this school)

Strategies used

- To ensure horizontal coherence in the English Language curriculum through
  - gradually integrating debate elective focusses, e.g. persuasive language, logical argumentation into the CP at S4
  - holistic mapping of major learning tasks for S1-3
- To strengthen a smooth interface between KS3 and KS4 through
  - promoting explicit teaching of language skills in task-based approach at junior secondary levels to help students build a firm language foundation
  - revising schemes of work in KS3 using a task-based framework
  - facilitating holistic planning of the four language skills in KS3 using a school-based Basic Competencies Progression Framework
  - promoting critical thinking in KS3 to help students cope with cognitively challenging tasks in the NSS

What happened

The change of approach in implementing the debate elective in 2008/09 & 2009/10

	2009-10
A. Making horizontal coherence at S4 by gradually integrating debate elective with the Core Part using task-based approach	

	Task	Shared focus between tasks in CP & EP
Module One Cultures of the World	Core Part : Write a travel brochure and itinerary	• Conduct research • Summarise information collected in own words • Plan writing using graphic organisers • Write descriptive texts • Use comparatives, superlatives and extreme adjectives
	Elective Part : Give a sales presentation for thematic tours to different tourist destinations	
Module Two Media & Entertainment	Core Part : Write an e-mail recommending a movie to your friends	• Identify main ideas or themes and key details • Distinguish facts from opinions • Express and make standpoints • Use reasoning to justify viewpoints or comments and give elaboration • Use persuasive language
	Elective Part : Present a TV commercial of an ideal Christmas present	
Module Three Rights & Responsibilities	Core Part : Write a two-sided argumentative essay	• Support arguments with reasons and evidence • Use persuasive language and useful expressions in debates • Identify pros and cons
	Elective Part : Participate in in-class and inter-class debates	

B. Promoting explicit teaching of language skills in task-based approach through revising the schemes of work to include a wide coverage of knowledge and skills

A sample of a scheme of work before the change

A sample of a scheme of work after the change

C. Facilitating holistic planning of the coverage of the four language skills in KS3 using a school-based Basic Competencies Progression Framework

A sample of the school-based Basic Competencies Progression Framework on reading

2010-11
Promoting critical thinking in KS3 English Language curriculum
Intellectual Standards (TSs) and Elements of Thoughts (TEs) developed by Paul and Elder (2009) were introduced in KS3 English Language curriculum

Intellectual Standards:		Elements of Thoughts:	
• Clarity	• Precision	• Purposes	• Inferences
• Accuracy	• Significance	• Questions at issue	• Concepts
• Relevance	• Fairness	• Points of view	• Implications
• Logic	• Depth	• Information	• Assumptions
• Breadth			

Step 1 – Developing among KS3 teacher coordinators a common understanding of TSs and TEs in reading and writing in the school-based context

Examples:

Intellectual Standard	What the guide says?	Reading		Writing	
		What it means?	Example	What it means?	Example
Significance -identifying the main or core issue	- Is this the most important problem to consider? - Is this the central idea to focus on? - Which of these facts are most important?	-Getting the main idea from the reading -Identifying the main issue covered in the text	- Identify the gist or main idea or theme of the text. - Explore why a certain part cannot be taken away from the text / event / idea.	- Developing a piece of writing on core ideas through the use of topic sentence	- What would be a core idea that cannot be skipped in your writing?

Elements of Thoughts	What does the guide suggest?	Reading		Writing	
		What to do?	Example	What it means?	Example
Point of view	Frame of reference, perspective, orientation	- Identifying viewpoints of different groups - Understanding reasons that lead to different viewpoints (Advanced : how different view points are backed up by evidence?)	- What viewpoints do different groups hold? - Who are the ones who share their viewpoints in the text? - Why do they hold such point of view? - Are conflicting viewpoints shared? - What are some conflicting viewpoints covered in the text?	- Entailing different viewpoints that different parties or stakeholders have towards an issue	- Who would probably have a view on the issue? - Are different points of view explored in the writing? / Are different viewpoints represented in the writing?

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<tr><td colspan="2">Step 2 – Mapping key tasks for KS3</td><td>Step 3 – Planning for the infusion of TSs &TEs into different modules in KS3</td></tr>
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Step 2 – Mapping key tasks for KS3

Year Theme	First Term	Key tasks			Second Term
		Listening	Speaking	Writing	
G7 Exploration (of the world around us, of the past and of the imaginary world)	Module 1 Cultures of the World (a) Food		-*Give an introduction of local food in one country as an Expo ambassador	-*Write an information report on local food in one country -*Write a recipe _	Module 3 Life in Ancient Rome (a)People(Slaves, Gladiators) (b)Education (c)Entertainment
	(b)Celebrity	-Listen to songs by singers and fill in words and give another title to the song	NSS-Debate Public speaking Research	-Write a personal profile *(summarize information)	NSS-Debate: - Research
	(c)Sports		-Give a presentation of one's favorite sport		Module 4 Exploration beyond the reality (a) Mysterious places
	(d)Music	-Music from different countries and of different genres highlighting the beat, rhythms etc.		-Write a story based on a piece of music of own choice	

An example of the key tasks mapped for one of the modules in S1

Step 3 – Planning for the infusion of TSs &TEs into different modules in KS3

Intellectual Standards

Significance	G7	G8	G9
M1			
M2		✓	
M3		✓	✓
M4	✓		

Relevance	G7	G8	G9
M1	✓		✓
M2			
M3			✓
M4			

Elements of Thoughts

Question at issue	G7	G8	G9
M1			✓
M2	✓		
M3			✓
M4		✓	

Points of view	G7	G8	G9
M1	✓		
M2			
M3	✓		
M4		✓	✓

Examples of tallies of TSs and TEs in reading and writing in different modules in KS3

Step 4 – Implementing teaching plans and materials with TSs and TEs infused

Example one of student output (TS)

S1 students were asked to research on and produce recipes for specific groups (athletes, pregnant ladies, children, elderly, etc.) of their own choice. Relevance (TS) of the recipes produced with the needs of the target group was emphasised.
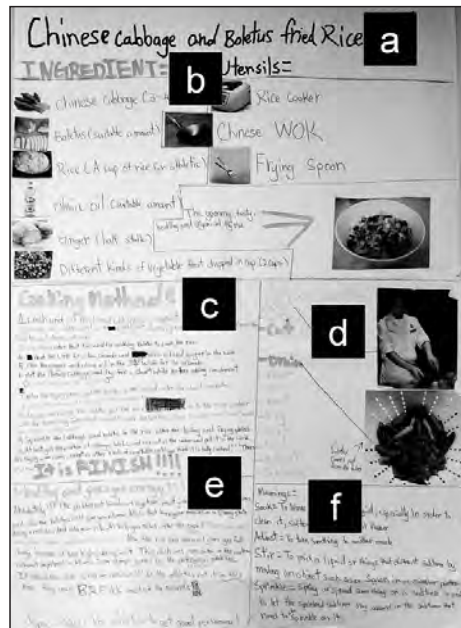
Sample student work - recipe

Annotations

a. Dish title   b. Ingredients
c. Cooking steps   d. Action verbs
e. Relevance (justification)
"Aim – Help the athletes get good performance :
Healthy and gives you energy? Absolutely! The different kinds of vegetables must give you lots of nutrients and also the boletus in it gives you vitamins that keep your muscles in a strong state during exercise…"
f. Word meanings

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Example two of student output (TE)

S1 students were asked to write the lyrics for a song about fighting in wars from a child soldier's point of view (TE).

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Annotation

Hope, hope to get a better life.
Hope, hope to get a better place.
Hope, hope to have a better house.
Hope, hope to have some better food,
Hope is so far away from us.
Hope is so beautiful for us.
Why can't we have a fair life?
Why (are we) captured by them?
Why (are we) child soldiers?
Hope, my hope will come true.
Hope, your hope will come true.
Hope, our hope will come true.

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Impact

- Teachers were convinced that **holistic planning** for the English curriculum at KS3, with gradual progression in language and thinking skills development, is vital in helping students meet the NSS challenge.

- **Gradual integration** of the debate elective focusses into the Core Part enabled students of all abilities to revisit the crucial language and thinking skills from time to time and thus is more conducive to better consolidation of their learning.

- Growth in **professionalism**, e.g. in gaining improved skills in curriculum mapping and using Intellectual Standards and Elements of Thoughts to support students' reading and writing, was noticed among curriculum leaders. Their horizons on curriculum development were also widened as reflected in the schemes of work produced which contain more details of expected learning outcomes. Teachers also shared that the KS3 English Language curriculum became more specific and well-elaborated than before.

- Certain critical thinking skills, e.g. ability to see things from different points of views, ability to attend to the question at core, ability to identify relevance between topics and requirements, etc. are deemed essential in students' preparation for the NSS. With Intellectual Standards and Elements of Thoughts introduced in the junior level curriculum, students were able to gradually practise and demonstrate the thinking skills in their work as shown in the above section. The infusion of the thinking skills also helped students build a firmer foundation in reading and writing.

Facilitating factors

- Since the entire project took place over a span of three years in which several curriculum leaders of different roles and with different expertise were involved at different stages, it was critical to **have the whole team to see the same big picture** while they were in the project. In the process, everyone knew clearly what they were trying to achieve in the end and how work in their respective areas could contribute to the final outcome.

- The use of more task-based **schemes of work** in which different elements (e.g. the different language skills, contexts, text types, learning products, etc.) were more **coherently linked** in 2009/10 enabled teachers to improve horizontal coherence and vertical continuity of the KS3 curriculum.

- **Constant review** of the project allowed early identification of good practices which enhanced learning and teaching effectiveness. It also allowed discovery of problems in time. There was always a better chance to fix a problem when it was noticed early.

Difficulties and suggestions

- Right solutions may not necessarily be sought in the first attempt. The team indeed experienced setbacks in implementing the Six Thinking Hats and different thought processes in the second year (09/10) when they tried to promote thinking in KS3.   Nevertheless, with much patience and careful evaluation of why things did not work out well in the first attempt, the team decided to focus on critical thinking instead and used the critical thinking model and tools from Paul and Elder (2009) in 10/11.

- Curriculum development is an on-going process which does not project an end.   Teachers have made tremendous efforts in this project to help their students meet the NSS challenge by improving the horizontal coherence and vertical continuity of their school-based English Language curriculum. Nonetheless, that only marked the beginning and continuous efforts in conducting constant review are needed to sustain their good work.

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