


Supporting holistic planning of the English Language curriculum

Overview

As part of the process of education reform, the English Language curriculum has been undergoing a number of changes. These changes are leading towards a more holistic approach to curriculum planning, which acknowledges the need for students to apply their understanding of language in authentic and challenging tasks, and to develop skills such as critical thinking and creativity along with their language skills. Pedagogy is also changing, with the reforms bringing a greater emphasis on students' active involvement in learning, and the need for a wide range of strategies to cater for learner diversity.

The table below shows some key elements of the changes in the English Language curriculum:

From.....		To....
fragmentation		integration
academic knowledge		real life application
teacher-centred approach		student-centred approach
summative assessment		formative assessment
exclusivity		inclusivity

During this period of change, the Language Learning Support Section has been working with English teachers to make the ideals and objectives of the curriculum reform a reality. The cases in this section of this compendium show how schools are tackling the challenge of planning the English Language curriculum holistically and coherently.

From fragmentation to integration

The English Language KLA Curriculum Guide (P1 – S3) recommends that teachers ensure that “learning activities or tasks stress the integration of skills rather than focus on isolated skills.” Over the years, LLSS officers have been working with schools to promote an integrated approach and to help teachers understand how the language skills are inter-related. For example, officers have worked on the integration of Reading Workshops with the GE Programme in primary schools, and on the integration of the Elective Part with the Compulsory Part at senior secondary level. Case 5.2 shows how aligning the different parts of the primary curriculum can help students develop as readers. The teaching of grammar in context has also been an important area of development. Case 5.5 explains how teachers in two primary schools engaged students in grammar learning within a task-based approach. In secondary schools, the introduction of School-based Assessment (SBA) as a part of the HKDSE examination has led to more emphasis on discussion skills and has encouraged teachers to begin these activities with lower form students. The quality of students' discussion usually depends on their knowledge of the topic in hand. Case 5.7 shows how one school addressed this issue by integrating the reading of news articles with discussion in the form of News Circles.

From academic knowledge to real life application

In order to face the challenges of life in the 21st century, students need not only language skills, but also well-developed generic skills such as critical thinking and creativity. Such skills will enable them to adapt to changes

in the workplace and equip them to be lifelong learners. These skills also have to be integrated into the teaching programme, along with the values and attitudes which students need to develop in order to become responsible participants in society. In recent years schools have become more aware of the need to integrate these skills into their school-based curriculum at all levels. Officers have worked on various projects involving thinking and communication skills, such as debating and public speaking. Case 5.8 shows how critical thinking and essential values can be developed in the context of the Compulsory Part of the English Language curriculum at senior secondary level.

From a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach

The dynamics of the 21st century workplace demand high-level skills in communication and the ability to interact and work with others in a team. Teachers now need to use a wide range of teaching methods and strategies to help students learn in the most effective way. The English Language KLA Curriculum Guide (P1 – S3) says that “In order to provide different learning experiences, a balanced and coherent school-based curriculum emphasising the active role of learners in the learning process should be developed.” Case 5.4 shows how students’ achievement and motivation to learn can be enhanced by the use of a student-centred approach.

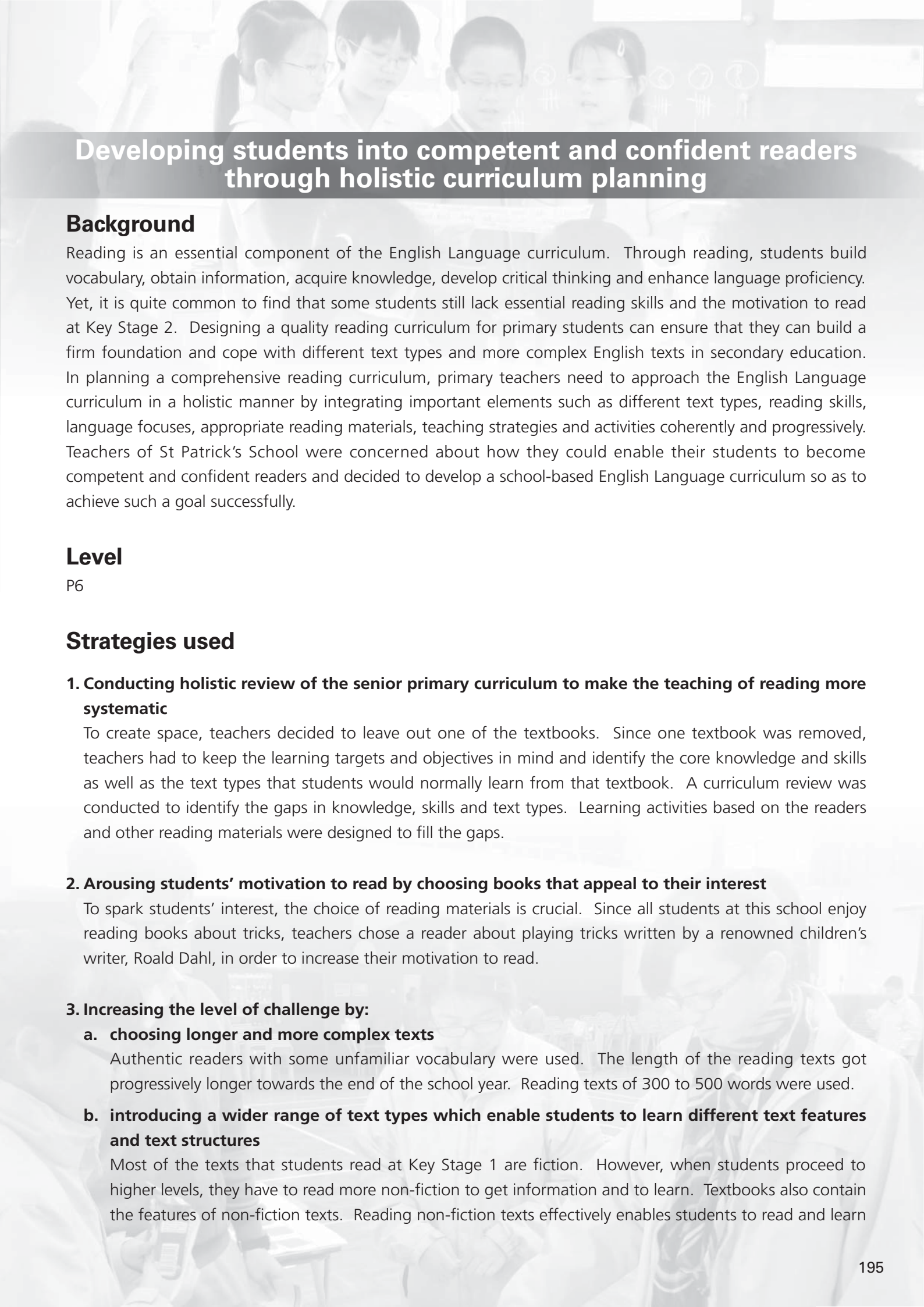
From summative assessment to formative assessment

Of course, summative assessment is a necessary part of the education process and continues to play an important role. However, in the context of the curriculum reform, teachers have been encouraged to develop their skills in formative assessment, collecting various kinds of data on student achievement and using these to inform future planning. LLSS officers have worked with teachers on improving their assessment practices, from questioning and feedback techniques to the setting of quality assessment papers. Officers have also helped schools to develop a cycle of evaluation, planning, implementation and evaluation (EPIE) with regard to their classroom practices and curriculum planning. Case 5.3 shows how one primary school reviewed their writing curriculum using this process, thereby improving the teaching of writing and enhancing students’ performance.

From exclusivity to inclusivity

Under the New Senior Secondary Curriculum a much larger cohort of students are now able to progress to S6. This has had major implications for schools, since they have to cater for the needs of a much wider range of student abilities at senior secondary level. This has also had an impact on the teaching of English in the junior forms and at KS2, since students need a strong foundation in the language in order to progress to the HKDSE. Because of the very wide range of abilities represented in most schools, teachers need to stretch the more able learners as well as scaffold the learning of the less proficient students. They also need to cater for different learning styles by using a variety of media and activities in their lessons. Over the years, LLSS officers have worked on a variety of projects to help teachers develop the necessary skills to accomplish these goals. Case 5.6 shows how one school integrated creativity and higher-order thinking into the school-based curriculum in order to help all students achieve their potential.

It is hoped that the cases presented here will give our readers an idea of how schools are developing a more holistic and student-centred approach to curriculum planning and task design, and how they are adapting the school-based curriculum to cater for the needs of different learners. We hope that teachers will find useful material here which they can adapt to their own school situations.



Developing students into competent and confident readers through holistic curriculum planning

Background

Reading is an essential component of the English Language curriculum. Through reading, students build vocabulary, obtain information, acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking and enhance language proficiency. Yet, it is quite common to find that some students still lack essential reading skills and the motivation to read at Key Stage 2. Designing a quality reading curriculum for primary students can ensure that they can build a firm foundation and cope with different text types and more complex English texts in secondary education. In planning a comprehensive reading curriculum, primary teachers need to approach the English Language curriculum in a holistic manner by integrating important elements such as different text types, reading skills, language focuses, appropriate reading materials, teaching strategies and activities coherently and progressively. Teachers of St Patrick's School were concerned about how they could enable their students to become competent and confident readers and decided to develop a school-based English Language curriculum so as to achieve such a goal successfully.

Level

P6

Strategies used

1. Conducting holistic review of the senior primary curriculum to make the teaching of reading more systematic

To create space, teachers decided to leave out one of the textbooks. Since one textbook was removed, teachers had to keep the learning targets and objectives in mind and identify the core knowledge and skills as well as the text types that students would normally learn from that textbook. A curriculum review was conducted to identify the gaps in knowledge, skills and text types. Learning activities based on the readers and other reading materials were designed to fill the gaps.

2. Arousing students' motivation to read by choosing books that appeal to their interest

To spark students' interest, the choice of reading materials is crucial. Since all students at this school enjoy reading books about tricks, teachers chose a reader about playing tricks written by a renowned children's writer, Roald Dahl, in order to increase their motivation to read.

3. Increasing the level of challenge by:

a. choosing longer and more complex texts

Authentic readers with some unfamiliar vocabulary were used. The length of the reading texts got progressively longer towards the end of the school year. Reading texts of 300 to 500 words were used.

b. introducing a wider range of text types which enable students to learn different text features and text structures

Most of the texts that students read at Key Stage 1 are fiction. However, when students proceed to higher levels, they have to read more non-fiction to get information and to learn. Textbooks also contain the features of non-fiction texts. Reading non-fiction texts effectively enables students to read and learn

from textbooks more easily. Therefore, teachers systematically included fiction and non-fiction texts in the curriculum.

Text features and text structures were explicitly taught in order to support students' reading. According to Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2010), "When students learn how to use text features, they are able to make better predictions, anticipate their learning, and comprehend the content being studied." Since the better the reader understands the text structures, the higher the comprehension, common text structures namely problems and solutions, cause and effect, sequence, comparison and description were also introduced to students. Teachers highlighted signal words and used graphic organisers to help students identify the text structures to improve their comprehension of texts.

4. Providing appropriate support to engage students in the reading process

Teachers provided systematic scaffolding of student learning in the reading process to increase students' sense of success and self-efficacy and thereby improve their motivation (Albert Bandura 1986) when reading longer and more complex texts. Different interactive learning activities such as drama games, listening to storytellers reading the story, watching video clips, role plays, discussion, etc. were conducted in the lessons to cater for the diverse needs of students with different learning styles. Students were also given the opportunity to celebrate their achievements in reading through an inter-class event.

What happened

The following steps were taken in developing the school-based curriculum:

1. Conducting a holistic review of the P6 curriculum

Teachers reviewed the curriculum and identified some gaps to be filled in the coverage of text types such as book reports, newspaper articles and leaflets and language items such as tenses, signal words, formulaic expressions and prepositions.

2. Working out a framework for holistic curriculum planning

Teachers made use of a curriculum framework to integrate different elements in the P6 curriculum. These included the sequence of readers, textbook units to be covered, the text types to be taught as well as the text features, text structures and core grammar focus under each theme. When designing the curriculum framework, teachers had to think about how to fill the gaps identified in the themes chosen. The items that were not covered in the textbook used were highlighted in the framework.

Readers/ Textbook Units / Materials written or adapted by teachers	Text types	Core text features	Core text structures	Core grammar focus
The Enormous Crocodile (Reader) <i># It was taught in the co-teaching lessons.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story • Play script • Informal letter • Poster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title • Bold print • Illustration • Dialogue • Stage direction • Greeting • Closure • Photo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story elements (setting, characters, problem/ solution, plot) • Sequence • Description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'would rather...than...' and 'prefer...to...' to express preference • Use 'perhaps/ maybe' to make suggestions as statements • Use 'such as' to list more than one example • Use 'before' and 'after' to talk about the sequence of two activities
Changes in Hong Kong (Textbook unit and reading)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaflet • Articles • Table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title • Topic sentence and supporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause and effect • Sequence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'either... or ...' to show choices • Use 'neither... nor...' to show two things that are not true or possible

3. Using fiction and non-fiction texts to increase students' motivation and enhance their reading skills

Teachers tried to include a variety of activities in order to engage students and increase their motivation.

- a. The following are the highlights of the activities or tasks showing how fiction was taught. The reader, "The Enormous Crocodile", was used as an entry point to develop students' reading and other language skills.

Objective	Activity																														
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help students understand the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers went through the cover and the back cover of the book to help students predict the likely development of the story. Teachers did a picture walk with students to introduce vocabulary and the setting of the story. Teachers showed a video about how a crocodile caught animals. Teachers used this video to show that crocodiles might eat children. 																														
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To motivate students to read the story To cater for different students' learning needs To help students follow the plot of the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To cater for different students' learning needs and make reading more interesting, teachers played a soundtrack produced by a famous storyteller. When students listened to the soundtrack for the first time, they had to listen carefully and focus on what they could hear. After that, the soundtrack was played again and students followed the words in their book. Teachers developed a table to help students follow the plot of the story. <div data-bbox="804 1028 1474 1397" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="text-align: center;">CHARACTER ANALYSIS CHART Animals that the Enormous Crocodile Met</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1st Animal</th> <th>2nd Animal</th> <th>3rd Animal</th> <th>4th Animal</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Animals:</td> <td>Hippopotamus</td> <td>Elephant ✓</td> <td>Monkey ✓</td> <td>Bird ✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Names:</td> <td>Humpy - Quumpy ✓</td> <td>Trunkus ✓</td> <td>Muggle - Wump ✓</td> <td>Polly - Polly Bird ✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Places they met:</td> <td>on the river bank ✓ brown</td> <td>In the jungle ✓</td> <td>In a nut tree ✓ nuts</td> <td>In an orange tree ✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Their Colour:</td> <td>brown and grey ✓</td> <td>grey ✓</td> <td>brown ✓</td> <td>blue, red, pink ✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>What were they doing?</td> <td>standing in the mud ✓</td> <td>Nibbling leaves from the tree</td> <td>Sitting in a tree and eating nuts</td> <td>Building a nest ✓ Building</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>		1 st Animal	2 nd Animal	3 rd Animal	4 th Animal	Animals:	Hippopotamus	Elephant ✓	Monkey ✓	Bird ✓	Names:	Humpy - Quumpy ✓	Trunkus ✓	Muggle - Wump ✓	Polly - Polly Bird ✓	Places they met:	on the river bank ✓ brown	In the jungle ✓	In a nut tree ✓ nuts	In an orange tree ✓	Their Colour:	brown and grey ✓	grey ✓	brown ✓	blue, red, pink ✓	What were they doing?	standing in the mud ✓	Nibbling leaves from the tree	Sitting in a tree and eating nuts	Building a nest ✓ Building
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce and apply the grammar focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target language was introduced by using the context of the story. The following example shows how to enable students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use "would rather...than..." and "prefer...to..." to express preference; - use "perhaps/maybe" to make suggestions as statements; and - use "such as" to list more than one example. <p>After showing students examples, teachers asked students to fill in the blanks using the target words. Then they had to express their opinions using these structures. They also wrote a letter to the Enormous Crocodile to show their preference of food and try to persuade him not to eat children using the structures that they had learned.</p> <div data-bbox="943 1688 1489 2130" style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>Part C The Notsobig One would like to persuade the Enormous Crocodile not to eat children. Read what he says and fill in the blanks with the given words.</p> <p>would rather prefer such as than to fresh maybe/perhaps children tuna</p> <p>You¹ <u>would rather</u> eat children</p> <p>² <u>than</u> have other meat because children are nice and juicy. I³ <u>prefer</u> eating vegetables⁴ <u>to</u> having meat. I think it is not good to eat⁵ <u>children</u> because they are not tasty.⁶ <u>Maybe</u> you can try some fish</p> <p>⁷ <u>such as</u> salmon or⁸ <u>tuna</u></p> <p>They are delicious and⁹ <u>fresh</u>.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; margin-top: 10px;">The Notsobig One</div> </div>																														

1. What would you like to eat for your dinner tonight?

I would rather eat ~~meat~~ ^{have} meat than ~~eat~~ ^{eat} vegetables. It is because meat is ~~gummy~~ ^{and} ~~its~~ ^{is} healthy. Maybe I can eat more vegetables, vegetables are healthier than meat.

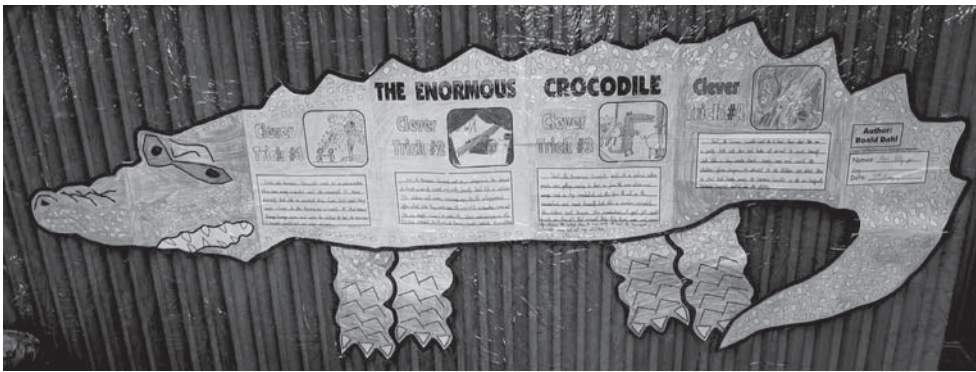
- To understand the attitudes and feelings of the characters
- To prepare students to read with appropriate emotion and volume
- To encourage students to participate actively in class

- The game "super star" was used to help students use appropriate volume and intonation to show feelings. Students threw dice showing different feelings and then they had to choose a volume level and read a line using the chosen volume level to show the feeling.
- Teachers analysed the play script adapted from the story. They discussed how the characters felt with students. Students worked in groups to do a readers' theatre using the play script.



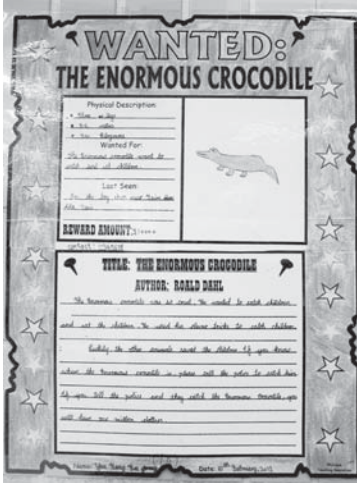
- To check students' understanding of the story
- To enable students to write a summary of the story

- Teachers gave guidelines for students to write a summary of the Enormous Crocodile's tricks in groups.

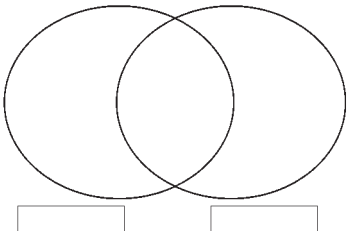
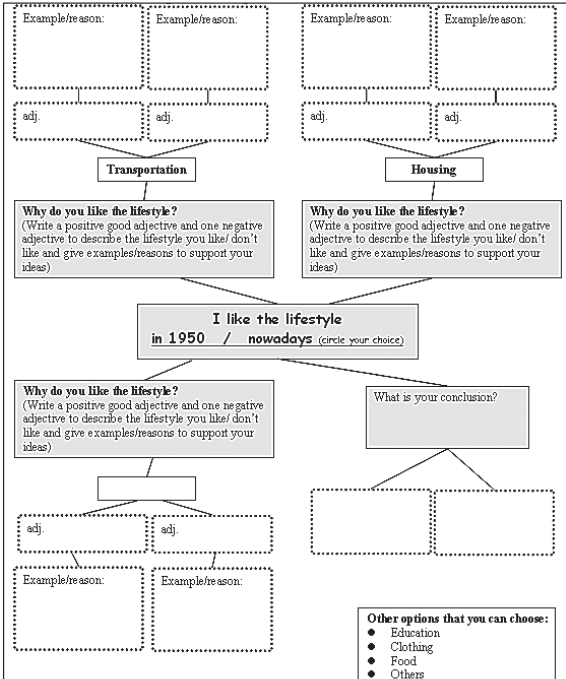


- To develop students' creativity and writing skills

- Students were asked to write a new trick for the story. Teachers brainstormed ideas and did shared writing in class. Then students wrote the story ending in groups and shared it with other classmates.
- Besides writing a new trick, students were asked to write a wanted poster to warn people about the crocodile. Before writing the poster, students were shown examples to draw their attention to the text features.



- b. The following are highlights of the activities or tasks showing how non-fiction was taught. The theme is "Changes in Hong Kong".

Objective	Activity								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop students' skills in reading non-fiction texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three articles about public housing, transportation and entertainment in Hong Kong were read with students. Text type features such as headings, captions, pictures, etc. were introduced. The strategy "THIEVES" was used to teach students how to extract information: Title, Heading, Introduction, Every first sentence in a paragraph, Visual elements such as graphs, End of chapter questions and Summary. Teachers used graphic organisers and highlighted signal words in order to teach text structures explicitly. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Using a Venn Diagram to compare the transportation in Hong Kong now and in the past</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <table border="1" data-bbox="919 725 1474 987"> <thead> <tr> <th>Time</th> <th>Events</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1945</td> <td>Many _____ from China came to Hong Kong.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1950</td> <td>Hong Kong was facing the _____ problem. About one fourth of the people lived in _____ on hillsides.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>A _____ in Shek Kip Mei broke out. Many squatter huts were destroyed and people became _____.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Using a timeline to show the development of public housing in Hong Kong</p> </div> </div>	Time	Events	1945	Many _____ from China came to Hong Kong.	1950	Hong Kong was facing the _____ problem. About one fourth of the people lived in _____ on hillsides.		A _____ in Shek Kip Mei broke out. Many squatter huts were destroyed and people became _____.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage students to participate actively in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After reading an article about public housing in Hong Kong, students were given a role card. As a guessing game, they had to describe the living conditions of a given kind of housing estate whereas other students had to guess the type of housing estate. Students had to discuss the good and bad points of different kinds of housing estates in groups. 								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop students' thinking skills and writing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students had to write about whether they liked the lifestyle in the 1950s or nowadays based on what they had read. A graphic organiser was given to students to help them organise ideas. <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="font-size: small; display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Focus: Writing Theme: Changes in Hong Kong Page 1 </p>								

4. Organising an inter-class English Fun Day as a platform for students to share successful reading experiences

An inter-class English Fun Day was held in the school hall at the end of the school year. Representatives from each class performed a readers' theatre showing the new tricks they had written. To cater for the diverse abilities of students, the more able and competent students put on the show by reciting the script whereas the less able ones could choose to read aloud from the script. After that, all the students worked in groups and had a quiz about the readers that they had read. This event provided an opportunity for different classes to share their reading experiences and success. They could apply what they had learned in the activities.



With support from the Visual Arts teachers, students designed crocodiles in the Visual Arts lessons and displayed their work.

Impact

1. Improved reading and writing skills

A pre-test and a post-test were administered at the beginning and at the end of the school year respectively. Four text types: book report, exposition, description and news article were included in the test. It was found that the students showed improvement in all the reading skills tested. Marked improvement was found in understanding intentions and attitudes as well as making inferences. Based on students' writing, it was found that they were able to apply the text features and text structures. They were able to use the target structures appropriately. The content was rich with lots of elaboration. The stories were creative.

2. Enhanced motivation to read

From the interviews with the students, many of them said that they were not afraid of reading long texts. They liked the reading lessons. Although some of the non-fiction texts were challenging, they agreed that reading non-fiction was important so they were willing to try their best to read them. Teachers also observed that some of them started reading other books written by Roald Dahl.

3. Being able to cope with the demands of reading in content subjects at secondary level

Some parents of the graduates reflected that their children were able to adapt to their learning in S1 without too much difficulty because they were used to reading long texts and they were familiar with non-fiction. Their knowledge of text structures and text features enabled them to cope with content area learning.

Facilitating factors

1. Collaborative efforts of teachers in planning and delivering the revamped English Language curriculum

Besides making joint efforts in reviewing and planning the curriculum holistically, P6 teachers also co-taught lessons to share teaching ideas and strategies. This provided a valuable opportunity for teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how to cover the reading curriculum effectively.



2. Creating space effectively

Developing such a school-based curriculum requires much manpower. Teachers therefore made use of the English Enhancement Grant to hire supply teachers to take up some of the teaching duties of core members to create space for them to conduct holistic curriculum planning and implement the re-structured curriculum effectively.

Co-teaching also involved extra manpower. Since teachers believed that high quality teaching in the lesson was more important and effective than arranging remedial lessons, they cancelled the remedial classes. Their decision was vindicated when all students showed improvement in their performance in reading and writing even though there were no remedial classes.

Conclusion

Using a more holistic approach to planning the school-based English Language curriculum, teachers of this school were able to stretch the potential of their P6 students and enabled them to become competent and confident readers to meet the reading challenge at secondary schools. A quality reading curriculum can also improve students' writing and increase their exposure to English. Through reading, students' world knowledge can be broadened and their learning-to-learn skills can also be sharpened.

References

Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Michelle J. Kelley and Nicki Clausen-Grace (2010). Guiding Students Through Expository Text with Text Feature Walks. Retrieved May 10, 2013, from http://www.ldonline.org/article/Guiding_Students_Through_Expository_Text_with_Text_Feature_Walks?theme=print

St Patrick's School
Connie LAM (Language Support Officer)

Effective teaching of writing through improved design of writing tasks

Background

In this writing project, teachers at SKH Mung Yan Primary School underwent a change in their perception of how to teach writing from a relatively product-oriented approach to a more process-oriented approach. Before the project, teachers expected their students to produce a piece of quality writing within two periods by just making use of a word bank or some guiding questions as prompts. Yet, teachers found that such an approach often failed to guarantee the production of quality work by students at the end. Their students' work still lacked original or rich ideas and even contained a lot of grammatical mistakes. To address such problems, teachers decided to review critically the writing curriculum and also their approach to teaching writing. More emphasis was placed on how to scaffold students' learning in a more systematic and effective manner to prepare them for the writing task. Writing was then done as an on-going process rather than just a final product to be produced after each unit or module.

Level

P5

Strategies used

1. Using the KISS approach to review the writing curriculum

Keep	Improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none">aligning the writing topics with those in the textbook unitsinfusing TSA question format into the writing curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">scaffolding students' writing by designing more pre-writing tasks (e.g. matching, listing, sequencing and surveying)strengthening the role played by the teacher: guiding students in the writing process instead of leaving them to struggle to write on their own
Stop	Start
<ul style="list-style-type: none">asking students to write on topics which bear no relevance to what they are learning in the English lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">giving thought to how writing can be integrated with the teaching of other language skills

2. Strengthening the scaffolding process by:

- setting out the learning outcomes (e.g. the target writing skills)
- improving the design of the writing tasks (e.g. providing a context and a purpose for writing)
- dividing the writing process into pre-, while- and post-writing stages

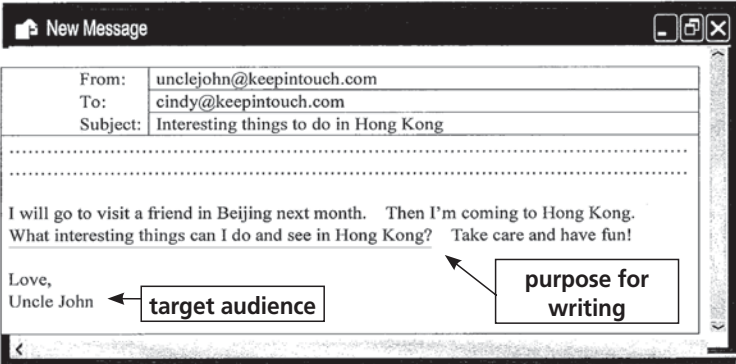

3. Identifying the target writing skills to develop among students by making reference to the English Language KLA Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6) and the Basic Competency Descriptors against the writing tasks designed for students to complete. The following shows the targeted writing skills:

- gather and share information and ideas by using strategies such as brainstorming, questioning, interviewing and reading
- plan and organise information, and express own ideas and feelings by:
 - identifying purpose and audience for a writing task
 - deciding the sequence of content
- write paragraphs which develop main ideas
- present main and supporting ideas, with elaboration where appropriate

What happened

In the writing project, the design of writing tasks was based on the themes in the textbook. Some of the writing tasks were also adapted from the TSA Practice Papers. In the six writing tasks developed together, teachers provided a clear context, focused on different text types (e.g. a recipe, an email, a newspaper article, a story, a school newsletter and a speech) and emphasised the purpose for writing and the intended audience at the pre-writing stage.

The following shows the scaffolding process at the pre-writing stage of a writing task which requires students to write a reply letter to Uncle John, based on Unit 3 and Unit 4 of the textbook used:

Objective	Step	Learning material
To heighten students' awareness of the target audience and purpose for writing	1. Get students to read an email from Uncle John to identify the target audience and purpose for their writing task	<p>Pre-writing Task 1 Can you remember in the email Uncle John sent to Cindy, he mentioned he would go to H.K.? Besides telling Cindy about his visit, what does he want to know from her? Read the email excerpt below to find out. Underline the key words.</p> 
To help students brainstorm as many special ideas to write as possible	2. Ask students to complete a mind map	<p>Pre-writing Task 2 Uncle John would like Cindy to tell him what to _____ and _____ in H.K. Cindy has the following things in mind for him.</p> 

To help students to **elaborate ideas** by providing them with more input before writing

3. Ask students to read information about the five museums given in the book and propose one for Uncle John's visit

Pre-writing Task 2a: Writing about a museum

Refer to P.19 of your textbook and you see 5 museums listed out. Choose one for Uncle John to visit and write in the email the following:

- where it is
- what to see
- how to go there
- how long it takes if he goes there from Tuen Mun

* You can refer to the handout given by the teacher to get extra information of the chosen museum. In the space below, put down some notes of the museum you get from the book and the handout.

- where it is _____

- what to see _____

- how to go there _____

- how long it takes if he goes there from Tuen Mun _____

4. Ask students to read information about some Chinese festivals and choose one to introduce and describe to Uncle John

Pre-writing Task 2b: Writing about a Chinese festival

Choose one Chinese festival you want to introduce to Uncle John. Put a "✓" in the box.

Mid Autumn Festival <input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese New Year <input type="checkbox"/>	Dragon Boat Festival <input type="checkbox"/>
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WHAT can you write about this festival?

Refer to the table below and pick the information that matches with the festival you choose.

I want to introduce _____ to Uncle John.	
When	<input type="checkbox"/> first month of the year <input type="checkbox"/> fifth month of the year <input type="checkbox"/> eighth month of the year
What to do	<input type="checkbox"/> watch the full moon <input type="checkbox"/> watch lion dances <input type="checkbox"/> watch dragon boat races <input type="checkbox"/> give red packets <input type="checkbox"/> play with lanterns <input type="checkbox"/> go swimming
What to eat	<input type="checkbox"/> moon cakes <input type="checkbox"/> radish or turnip cakes <input type="checkbox"/> rice dumplings

5. Ask students to choose one tourist spot for Uncle John to visit and provide details about what he can do there

Pre-writing Task 2c: Writing about a popular tourist spot

Besides the six places of interest you find on P.20 of the textbook, there are other popular tourist spots in H.K. too. The table below shows you all of them. Match the names on the left with what you can do and see there on the right.

Where to go		What to do
1. The Avenue of Stars (Tsim Sha Tsui)	()	a. visit the traditional Chinese building
2. The Big Buddha (Lantau Island)	()	b. shop at the flea market
3. The Cultural Centre (Tsim Sha Tsui)	()	c. see the world's largest bronze statue
4. Disneyland (Lantau Island)	()	d. enjoy the beautiful view of the Victoria Harbour
5. Ocean Park (Aberdeen)	()	e. see handprints of movie stars
6. The Peak Tower (The Peak)	()	f. make a wish
7. Stanley Market (Stanley)	()	g. enjoy exciting rides
8. Tai Fu Tai Mansion (San Tin)	()	h. watch sea animals
9. Temple Street and Ladies' Market (Yau Ma Tei)	()	i. watch dramas and concerts
10. The Wishing Tree (Lam Tsuen)	()	j. shop for bargain goods

Choose one which you think Uncle John is interested in visiting. Write down notes in the space given.

- what to see and do
(The exercise above tells you only one thing. Think of other things he can do and see there)

- where the place is _____

- how to get there _____

- how long it takes to get there from Tuen Mun _____

6. Ask students to brainstorm local foods and think of one kind for Uncle John to try

Pre-writing Task 2d: Writing about a special kind of H.K. food

Seafood, egg tarts, fish balls, dim sum and wonton are some of the special food you can eat in H.K. Can you think of others? Pick one to introduce to Uncle John. You can talk about:

price: cheap, expensive or reasonable

H. K. food

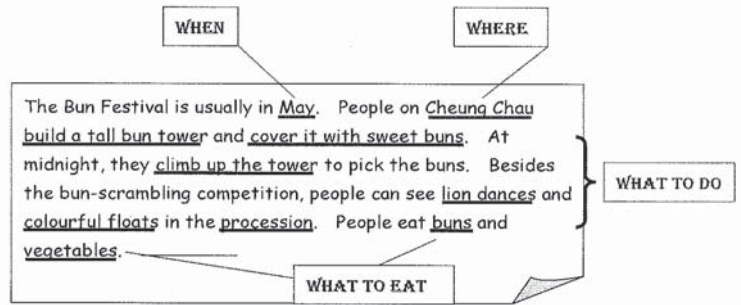
taste: sweet, sour, bitter, spicy

where you can eat it: restaurant or street stalls

To show students **how the information is organised** in a paragraph

7. Analyse the description of the Bun Festival for students to see how the information is put together.

HOW do you write about this festival? Let's read about the description of Bun Festival which you learnt in Unit 3.



After completing all the steps at the pre-writing stage, students were equipped with both the content and language needed to write the email. In the writing stage, they were given a framework to organise their ideas.

Writing Task
By now, you can use the notes you put down for Pre-tasks 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d to help Cindy write the reply letter to Uncle John.

New Message

To: unclejohn@keepintouch.com
From: cindy@keepintouch.com
Subject: Interesting things to do in Hong Kong

I am _____ to learn that you are coming to H.K. Let me tell you what you can _____ and _____ while you are here.

I know you like history, so you must visit the _____ (museum)

If you still have time, you can go to _____ (a tourist spot)

It is fun to know more about the _____ Festival in H.K. too. During this festival, _____

Last of all, there are different kinds of special food you can eat in H.K. Above all, you must try _____

Hope to see you very soon!
Love,

The framework for writing the email

After students completed their writing, they were encouraged to edit their own writing with the support of a self-editing checklist at the post-writing stage.

Do you have the following information in your email? (Put a tick "☑" in the boxes)

- Uncle John's name
- A greeting
- The names of the places or activities
- Questions Cindy wants to ask Uncle John
- A closing line
- Cindy's name

A checklist for self-editing after writing

Impact

Curriculum

With the use of KISS at the beginning of this project, the writing curriculum was more coherently integrated with the other language skills in the school-based curriculum. It was found that there was much more comprehensive coverage of text types and writing skills in the curriculum. The emphasis of the writing curriculum had also shifted from an outcome-oriented approach to a more process-oriented approach.

Teachers

Teachers learned the importance of doing curriculum mapping for writing at the start of the planning process. Knowing the spread of writing topics, text-types and writing skills to cover over the year helped them plan the writing curriculum and choose which strategies to use. It also enabled them to revisit what had already been covered and prevented overlapping.

Teachers' awareness of the need to align the teaching process with the expected outcome was heightened. They gained a better understanding of what writing skills they should teach.

In addition to producing materials for a writing curriculum at one level, teachers also developed a better understanding of how to plan and implement change on a manageable scale. By working together, discussing and sharing experience of actual classroom practice and the rationale for the strategies chosen, teachers enhanced their teaching effectiveness and made an impact on student learning.

Students

With all the scaffolding work done, students were able to produce a detailed email to send to Uncle John. The following are two examples of students' writing:

Dear Uncle John.

I am happy to learn that you are coming to H.K. Let me tell you what you can do and see while you are here.

I know you like history, so you must visit the Museum of Tea Ware. It is on Hong Kong Island. You can see a lot of teas and tea cups. You can go there by MTR train. It takes 45 minutes from Tuen Mun to Hong Kong Island.

If you still have time, you can go to Ocean Park. It is in Aberdeen. You can see the sea animals. You can go there by bus. It takes two hours from Tuen Mun to Aberdeen.

It is fun to know more about the Dragon Boat Festival in H.K. too. During this festival, you can watch dragon boat races and go swimming. You can eat rice dumplings too.

Last of all, there are different kinds of special food you can eat in H.K. Above all, you must try seafood on the boat in Sai Kung. It is cheap and sweet.

by Cheung Kei Tung (P.5E)

This student did not just give the name of the museum and the tourist spot. He was able to provide additional information on where they are, what to see, how to get there and how long the journey takes.

This student was able to tell Uncle John when the festival is, what people do and what they eat.

He was able to introduce the special food, including its taste and shape, to Uncle John.

Hi Uncle John,

I am excited to learn that you are coming to H.K. Let me tell you what you can do and see while you are here.

I know you like history, so you must visit the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence. It is near Shau Kei Wan MTR station and bus stops. You can see the coastal defence before 600-year history. You can go there by bus. It's takes about half hour to get there.

If you still have time, you can go to The Peak Tower. It is at The Peak. You can see the views of Victoria Harbour. You can go there by bus too. It's takes about one and half hours.

It is fun to know more about the Chinese New Year in H.K. too. It is usually in first month of the year. People will watch lion dance and give red packets. People eat radish or turnip cakes too.

Last of all, there are different kinds of special food you can eat in H.K. Above all, you must try egg tarts. They are sweet, round and yummy. They are cheap. People like to eat too.

by Boris (P.5C)

Analysis of their performance in the writing paper in the final examination showed that students were able to produce essays with richer content. Generation of ideas through the use of mind maps, wh-questions and discussion was confirmed to have been effective in lessening their reluctance to write.

Facilitating factors

Effective use of student learning evidence helped to convince teachers that it is worth spending more than two lessons on teaching writing. In the revised programme, although more time was spent on explicit teaching of writing and scaffolding of students' learning, it turned out to be more cost-effective in the long run since writing could be integrated with the teaching of other language skills using the process-oriented approach. This resulted in students' language learning repertoire being enriched.

Effective deployment of manpower enabled teachers to share the workload. In the writing project, six English teachers took turns to do in-depth planning for just one writing task throughout the year and to serve as critical buddies for the other five. They developed ownership of what they designed while at the same time enjoying the opportunity to comment on and try out the tasks designed by their colleagues. This kind of peer learning proved to be very effective in empowering teachers to make curriculum decisions which were appropriate to the needs of their students.

Way forward

Teachers in the project will adopt and adapt what they have learned at both the pedagogical and curriculum levels to do holistic planning of the writing curriculum. The next area they have to work hard on is to enable students to apply what they have learned in their GE lessons to their writing, in order to improve their accuracy.

Effective use of stories to make learning fun and engaging

Background

Stories are very rich teaching resources to engage students actively in classroom activities. The story components and interesting contexts can stretch students' imagination, thus making learning more enjoyable. When teachers can use stories effectively, they help their students develop a keen interest in reading, acquire useful reading strategies, apply integrated skills, participate more actively in classroom activities and learn with great fun. With well-designed student-centred activities in teaching stories, teachers can promote active learning among students even at Key Stage 1 that may result in students' deep learning, understanding and transfer (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

Teachers of Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School were able to make very effective use of stories as an extension of textbook units to increase students' enjoyment and foster more active learning. They designed a great variety of student-centred activities and post-reading tasks to meet the diverse needs of individual students in P3. In the learning process, there was much peer learning and sharing. Opportunities were also created for students to apply the language skills learned in the textbook units and inject creativity into their learning products.

Level

P3

Strategies used



Teachers' concern	Strategy
How to promote active learning among students through the use of stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using cooperative learning activities to foster peer learning• Introducing online reading to promote independent learning• Asking students to adopt the perspectives of different characters in a story
How to make learning fun using stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using different language activities such as running dictation and chanting• Providing opportunities in the Reading Workshops for students to inject creativity such as creating a new ending for a story or designing a model vehicle for some characters in a story
How to foster students' language development through the use of stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making use of a readers' theatre to develop students' speaking and presentation skills• Providing opportunities for students to apply the vocabulary and language items learned in the textbook units in the context of different stories• Making coherent links between students' reading and their writing

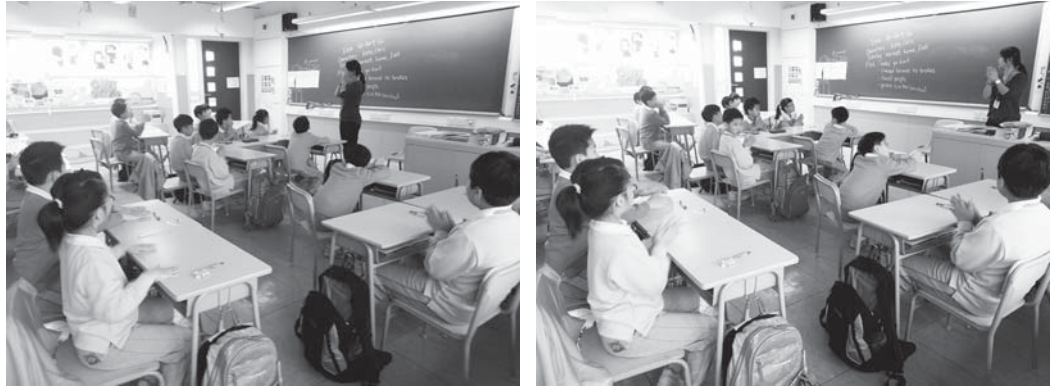
What happened

Each story was taught after teaching a textbook unit and students were required to use and apply the language items and vocabulary learned in the unit in the writing task. The following table shows the implementation details:

Implementation

Time / Objective	Story and activity
<p>5 lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students story components and help them analyse the structure of the story • Support students to create a new ending 	<p>Story 1: The story 'The elves and the shoemaker' was aligned with the unit 'Beautiful colours'.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers used a story map and pictures in the book to help students recall different story components, i.e. characters, setting and plot (beginning, problems and solutions, ending). • Teachers used the pictures to guide students to reconstruct the story and helped them develop their ideas about what the characters would say and think in a new ending. Then students were invited to share their answers in class. • Students then completed the dialogues and captions individually, using the colours and demonstrative determiners learned in the story. • Lastly, students were guided to draw a picture of the new ending and to add dialogues and captions to it.
<p>6 lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide visual and audio stimuli to help students comprehend the story • Consolidate students' learning of the target adjectives through playing a game 	<p>Story 2: The story 'Silly Jack and the dancing mice' was aligned with the unit 'Feelings'.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers presented the story in PowerPoint while reading it aloud with appropriate facial expressions and intonation. • Students were also encouraged to read and listen to the story online in their free time. • Students did a "running dictation" activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers posted the sentences on the walls of the corridor. Students worked in groups. They took turns to be the leaders to go out to the corridor and memorise a sentence. - After returning to the classroom, the leaders repeated the sentence to the group members who wrote it down. - The first group to finish writing the sentences correctly were the winners.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students identify the text features of a diary entry and provide them with an opportunity to apply the adjectives learned in the unit 	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Students doing running dictation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers helped students to identify the text features of a diary entry (e.g. using past tense and expressing personal feelings). • Students used a mindmap to develop and organise their ideas for writing a diary entry as one of the characters in the story. They then wrote the diary entry using the target adjectives from the textbook unit.
<p>6 lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the key words to help students work out the links between the sentences • Motivate students by making learning more fun • Create a context for students to use words learned in spoken and written forms 	<p>Story 3: The story 'Go-kart, go!' was aligned with the unit 'We can make things'.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers gave out sentences containing imperatives and connectives learned in the textbook unit. With the help of the connectives and other key words, students worked in groups to discuss and sequence the sentences to show what happened after the characters started the go-kart ride. • After helping students recap the main characters and the storyline, teachers drew students' attention to the scene of the kart being out of control. • Then teachers introduced the chant and demonstrated how to read it. • Afterwards, students were asked to tap on the desks and clap their hands to familiarise themselves with the rhythm of the chant. • Next, students were led by teachers to sing the chant with different voices and tempo while tapping the rhythm of the words. • After repeating a few times, students added gestures and actions to show the moods of the chant and emotions of the characters.



Students clapping the rhythm of the chant

- Teachers showed students how to write the steps for making a model vehicle.
- Then students designed a model car for the characters in the story.
- They drew pictures and wrote instructions for making their model car, following the example given by the teacher.

6 lessons

Story 4:

The story 'I want a unicorn' was aligned with the unit 'Keeping pets'.

Activities:

- Engage students actively in class by playing a game
- Promote peer learning through cooperative learning
- Help students relate the writing task to the reading text
- Teachers played a game by showing pictures of all the characters on PowerPoint slides and asking students to look for their names.
- Teachers elicited from students the main characters, setting and the plot to prepare them for the readers' theatre.
- Teachers invited students to put themselves into the shoes of different characters when reading aloud some sentences from the story. Students were encouraged to use stress, intonation, pauses, gestures and facial expressions to show the personalities and feelings of the characters.
- Next, students were assigned different roles.
- Teachers gave out the script and arranged students in groups according to the roles assigned to them.
- Students in the same group shared how they would present the lines with facial expressions and body movements and did the practice together.
- Students got into new groups in which each member played the role of a different character. They read the script aloud with appropriate gestures.
- Selected groups were invited to perform their readers' theatre in front of the class.



Students playing the same role rehearsing together



A group performing

- Teachers helped students recap the story and asked them to act as customers of Pete's peculiar pet shop to set the scene for the writing task.
- As pre-writing task activities, students were asked to make a list for other pet owners using 'should have' and 'should do'. Afterwards, teachers helped them brainstorm and organise ideas and then asked them to do independent writing.
- Students presented their written work at the post-writing stage.

Impact

On students

All P3 students were highly engaged in the activities since they found them contextualised and full of fun. They displayed great interest in the activities and took part in them seriously. Because of their collaborative nature, the activities also catered for students' diverse needs. For example, when taking part in the running dictation, more able students supported the less able ones by telling them the correct pronunciation or spelling of a word. When preparing for the readers' theatre, students of all ability levels tried their best to interpret the roles well and improve their performance by seeking advice from their peers. It was observed that students were engaged in the lessons and even the weaker students participated actively. Their active participation was reflected by the figures obtained from a survey conducted at the end of the project. 91.2% of students indicated that they loved the running dictation, 70.2% liked the chanting activity and 83.9% enjoyed the readers' theatre.

Students also made improvement in their language skills. As reflected in the reading assessment data, one of the classes demonstrated steady growth in all areas (i.e. scanning, referencing, inferring and skimming) with the total score of the fourth assessment being 69% higher than the first one. The weakest class also made remarkable improvement in making inferences while the other two classes displayed progress in scanning. In pair and group work, there was still room for improvement in their listening and speaking skills. In writing, students were able to present a lot of interesting ideas and organise them in paragraphs. In the survey, 89.7% of students expressed that it was good to relate the writing task to the story. 83.8% of students believed they wrote more when the writing task was about the story and 89.7% thought they could use words they learned in the lessons in their writing. Such findings indicate that reading provided a good context for the writing tasks in which students could apply the language and words learned. In short, students found learning more meaningful and contextualised when there was connection between the GE Programme and the Reading Workshops.



On teachers

Teachers have developed a heightened awareness of their students' learning preferences when planning the Reading Workshops. To promote active learning and create fun for students, teachers learned to design a great variety of activities to meet the varied needs of individual students.

Teachers selected reading texts which could tie in with the textbook units so that students could apply the language items acquired in their writing. They also developed knowledge and skills in integrating different stories with the textbook units and were able to view the school-based curriculum in a more coherent manner.

Conclusion

The positive survey findings on students' improvement in reading and their active engagement in the classroom activities can reflect that teachers of this school have successfully used stories to enrich their students' English learning experiences and students have shown deeper learning in the process. The activities were student-centred so that the students were able to learn actively through collaborating and interacting with each other. They were also given a lot of chances to include their own creative ideas, to think, to do tasks and to present their work. Therefore, for schools to design a quality reading curriculum, it is important to address students' interests, and make enough space in the curriculum for students' active and fun learning.

Reference

Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. (1991). Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, D.C. The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

Fukien Secondary School Affiliated School
Maria CHAU (Language Support Officer)

Engaging students in grammar learning activities and tasks in task-based learning

Background

Grammar is often presented out of context in textbooks or grammar books. Isolated sentences are used to explain grammar rules and this is normally followed by drilling exercises. However, it is difficult to expect our students to learn grammar through exercises involving repetition and grammatical transformation only. To enable students to learn grammar effectively, teachers need to handle the three dimensions of form (accuracy), meaning (meaningfulness) and use (appropriateness). As suggested in the English Language Curriculum Guide (2002), teachers should engage learners in exercises or activities ranging from those consisting of discrete grammar items to those encouraging contextualised grammar practice. The task-based approach encourages the learning and teaching of grammar in context so that learners gain a better understanding of how, why and when to use particular language items or structures.

Teachers of Kowloon Tong Bishop Walsh Catholic School and Tsz Wan Shan St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School have tried the suggested approach with their P4 and P6 students to help them build up their competence in applying grammar appropriately.

Levels

P4 and 6

Strategies used

A 4-step strategy to help students apply grammar knowledge effectively was adopted.

1. Promoting initial understanding

Teachers engaged the students in language practices which helped them familiarise themselves with the **form** of the target language.

2. Providing opportunities for application in controlled situations

Teachers designed activities which required students to use the language to express **meanings** that communicated new information to other people in controlled situations.

3. Providing opportunities for application in authentic situations

Teachers designed tasks with a clear context and purpose for students to **use** the language in authentic communication.

4. Deepening understanding and consolidating learning

Teachers revisited the use of the target language when students were carrying out the writing task and supported them to reflect on their performance by asking them to proofread and edit their own work.

What happened

The first school case was developed by Kowloon Tong Bishop Walsh Catholic School with the following details:

Level: P4

Units: Have you done it yet?

Out and about in Hong Kong

Task: Writing a postcard

Language: Using the past tense to talk about past activities and the present perfect tense to relate past events to the present

A unit excerpt focusing on grammar activities and tasks is shown below:

Promoting initial understanding	Using grammar games <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students highlighted the different forms and functions of the past and the present perfect tenses using the text from the textbook.• Students played a card game to match the words with their forms in the present and the past tenses to help them grasp the language forms of the target grammar items in the unit. Students also needed to suggest the spelling of the words in the present perfect tense.
Providing opportunities for application in controlled situations	Information gap activity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers assigned students to be Student A and Student B to work on an information gap task. Students A and B asked each other questions about different countries to exchange new information and wrote down their partner's answers.• Teachers brainstormed some other countries and activities with students. Students drew a picture about the activities to do in a foreign country on a worksheet and wrote some sentences about the picture. Students completed another information gap task on picture drawing.
Providing opportunities for application in authentic situations	Writing a postcard <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers explained the purpose and context of the task. Students needed to write a postcard to a friend to describe where they had been and what they did there.• Teachers brainstormed ideas with students in class.
Deepening understanding and consolidating learning	Checking grammar at the post-writing stage <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers asked students to proofread a postcard to check accuracy, meaning and appropriateness of the target grammar items used in their writing.• Teachers discussed with students how they could edit their own writing.• Students edited their own writing and wrote the second draft.

The second case was developed by Tsz Wan Shan St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School with the following details:

- Level: P6
- Unit: Going to the movies
- Task: Writing a movie review
- Language: Connectives

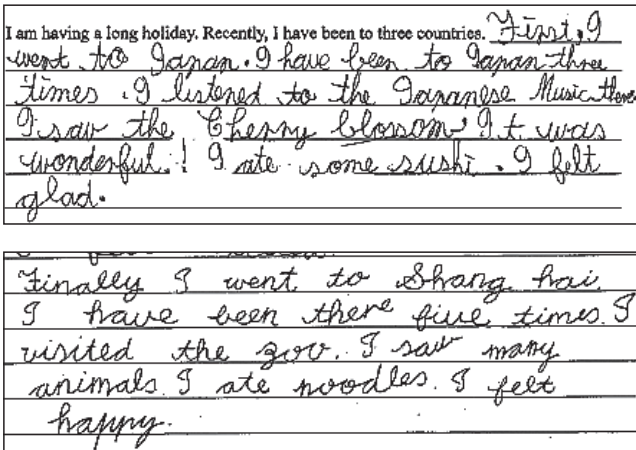
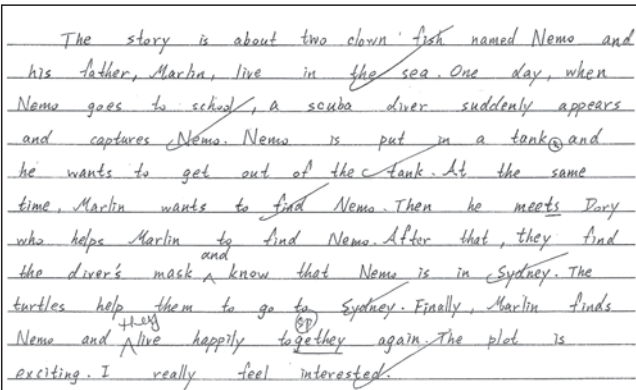
A unit excerpt focusing on grammar activities and tasks is shown below:

<p>Promoting initial understanding</p>	<p>Using think-pair-share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read aloud sentences using connectives learned before in class. • Teachers asked each group of students to draw a word card with a connective. Each student wrote a sentence using the connective drawn by the group. Students shared the sentences in pairs and checked the accuracy of the sentences. They also shared the sentences in groups, chose the best sentence and presented the sentence in class. • Teachers gave feedback on the accuracy of the sentences.
<p>Providing opportunities for application in controlled situations</p>	<p>Writing a summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read the story “Three Little Pigs”. They distinguished between main ideas and details in the story. Teachers demonstrated how to delete unimportant information from the first paragraph and taught students to include only main ideas in a summary. • Students worked in groups to delete unimportant details from the other paragraphs and shared the main ideas in class. • Students discussed what connectives to use to link the main ideas in class. Students wrote a short summary with connectives in groups. • Students shared the summary in class and the teacher gave feedback.
<p>Providing opportunities for application in authentic situations</p>	<p>Writing a movie review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After asking students to watch the movie “Finding Nemo”, teachers showed 2 pictures of the movie and asked students to suggest the main ideas using question words (where, who, when, what, why, how, etc.) and write sentences about the pictures in groups. Teachers also reminded students to use appropriate connectives. • Students shared their work in class and teachers gave feedback on content, language and the use of connectives. • Teachers showed six more pictures of the movie “Finding Nemo” and discussed with students how to sequence them and use them to write a movie review. • Teachers reminded students to add their opinions about the movie in the movie review. • Students wrote their own movie review.

Deepening understanding and consolidating learning	Checking grammar at the post-writing stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students proofread the tenses, adjectives and connectives in a movie review. Teachers highlighted common grammar mistakes. • Teachers went through the assessment form with students. Students revised and edited their first draft. • Students handed in the final draft.
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Impact

Teachers from both schools agreed that most students could use the target language items or structures appropriately in their writing tasks. Students not only found the variety of grammar activities and tasks very interesting, but also thought that they were useful and meaningful. They were eager to participate in the grammar activities and produce their products. Most important of all, they also had a role in assessing their own application and usage of grammar items in the learning process.

Kowloon Tong Bishop Walsh Catholic School	Tsz Wan Shan St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School
 <p>Students used the past and the present perfect tenses appropriately to talk about their travel experiences.</p>	 <p>Connectives were used appropriately to link up ideas in the story.</p>

Pre- and post-tests on tenses and writing were conducted in Kowloon Tong Bishop Walsh Catholic School. A proofreading test on tenses was done by all the P4 students (a total of 102 students) at the beginning and at the end of the year. The average marks increased from 3.23 to 6.04 (87% increase). The target students selected by the teachers were divided into high, medium and low ability groups. The average marks increased in all the three groups:

High ability group:	from 4.38 to 7.25 (65.5% increase)
Medium ability group:	from 3.5 to 6.63 (89.4% increase)
Low ability group:	from 1.75 to 4 (128.6% increase)



Students also made fewer mistakes with tenses when their performances in the pre- and post-tests on writing were compared. The writing tests were carried out at the beginning and at the end of the year. The number of mistakes of a target group of 24 students chosen by teachers was counted. In the pre-test, students made 77 mistakes in the form, meaning or use of tenses. In the post-test, only 30 such mistakes were found (58% decrease). It was shown that students could use tenses (including the form, meaning and use) much more appropriately in the post-test.

Pre- and post-tests on writing were also conducted in Tsz Wan Shan St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School. The students showed a significant improvement in the use of connectives in context. A range of connectives was used by students correctly in the post-test. The number of mistakes of a target group of 30 students chosen by teachers was counted. In the pre-test, students made an average of 18 mistakes in the use of connectives. In the post-test, an average of only 1 mistake was found (94% decrease).

It is believed that coherent grammar activities and tasks completed within a meaningful context were effective in helping students learn and use the different target language items during the year.

The teachers involved in this project enhanced their understanding of the role and place of grammar in English language teaching. In addition to that, they also developed a wider repertoire of grammar teaching ideas. The use of pre- and post-test data also provided the teachers with an opportunity to reflect on how data can be used to inform planning. Based on the results of this project, the teachers are now in a better position to effect positive and informed changes to the way grammar is taught in their classrooms.

Facilitating factors

The teachers at the schools were enthusiastic and willing to find ways to address students' grammar learning needs. They provided many opportunities for their students to recycle grammar items and structures and engage in tasks designed to make explicit the links between form, meaning and use.

The use of the task-based approach made all the learning activities more contextualised and coherent. This engaged students' interest and helped them to appreciate the importance of correct grammar usage for effective communication.

Reference

The Curriculum Development Council. (2002). English Language Education: KLA Curriculum Guide (P1-S3). HKSAR: The Education Department.

**Kowloon Tong Bishop Walsh Catholic School
Tsz Wan Shan St Bonaventure Catholic Primary School
Pearl KOAH (Language Support Officer)**

Stretching students' potential by creating greater flexibility in the curriculum

Background

Every student is an individual who possesses the potential for making positive progress in different aspects of their personal growth. The ultimate goal of education is to tap every student's potential despite the fact that students can differ a lot in their prior knowledge and skills, learning styles, multiple intelligences, interests and backgrounds. To achieve such a goal, the school-based curriculum needs to be flexible enough to meet individual students' needs instead of having the same learning ceiling for all. As Winebrenner (1992) pointed out, "for all children to make progress, teachers should differentiate learning experiences and remove the learning ceiling, allowing a student who is ready to learn at a faster pace and more complex level to continue learning each day".

Teachers of Baptist (Sha Tin Wai) Lui Ming Choi Primary School uphold the principle that their school-based curriculum should cater to the needs of different students "so that their potential, no matter where they lie in the ability spectrum, can be maximally developed." (Education Department's Gifted Education Policy Paper, 2000). Through providing a flexible framework in the curriculum to stretch every student's potential, teachers found that they could broaden all students' knowledge base and develop their higher-order thinking and independent learning skills.

Levels

P4-P6

Strategies used

To create greater flexibility in the curriculum, the following strategies have been adopted to stretch every student's potential under a flexible curriculum framework:

Year	Level	Strategy			
2010-11	P5	Infusion of secondary level language arts and non-language arts elements	--	Inclusion of a greater variety of more complex text types	--
2011-12	P6		Infusion of the three core elements of Gifted Education: creativity, higher-order thinking and personal-social competence		--
2012-13	P4			Improvement of the coherence of the school-based curriculum and promotion of independent learning	

What happened

The following table shows how to stretch P5 students' potential in 2010-11:

Infusion of secondary level language arts and non-language arts elements	Infusion of more complex text types
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short stories • Debating • Social issues • Popular culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems and songs • Workplace communication • Sports communication • Feature articles • Book reviews • Newspaper articles • Debating speeches • Film reviews

The following table shows an example of the unit “The Lost World” with the three core elements of Gifted Education included to stretch P6 students’ potential in 2011-12:

Pre-task 1: The extinction of dinosaurs

1. Students visited the school’s planetarium and watched a video clip about the extinction of dinosaurs.
2. Students discussed the questions below:

Questions for discussion:

- (i) What was life like for dinosaurs?
- (ii) Suggest two reasons for the death of dinosaurs.
- (iii) What happened to dinosaurs' bodies after they died?



3. Students conducted research on the topic and read from various sources as homework.
4. They shared their findings in pairs, then in groups of four and individually. Teachers debriefed students and asked higher-order thinking questions (e.g. Were the dinosaurs killed by a direct hit from a meteor?)

Pre-task 2: Bones under bathtub

1. Teachers showed students a news article from the local newspaper:

Bone fragments found under bathtub

Bone fragments were discovered by some repair technicians while removing the bathtub to fix a leak. The case was reported to the police.

2. Students were given 3 discussion questions:

- (i) Whose bones were they?
- (ii) Why were the bones there? What happened?
- (iii) How should we start the investigation? (Who to ask? What to read? What to do?)

3. Students shared in pairs, then in groups of four and individually.

Examples of students' answers

Whose bones were they?

Man (master of the house); woman; neighbour(s); friends; family

Why were the bones there? What happened?

The master killed his friend/ family members; A man killed a woman as the woman knew something which the man did not want her to tell.

How should we start the investigation?

Murder stories can give ideas; ask whether the neighbours have heard some noises when the killer killed, smelled bad odour, seen something or someone related to the case; find clues (e.g. hair, fingerprints or bloodstains) in the bathroom.

4. Teachers gave students Part 2 of the news article.

Bone fragments found under bathtub

The investigators asked the technicians to crack open the other parts of the tub. 'Other remains' were discovered – fish and pork bones and fragments of disposable lunch boxes. The police believe that those were rubbish left behind by construction workers.

Pre-task 3: Skeleton under the planetarium

1. A situation was presented to students. The teacher explained that the incident took place on the school campus.

Situation

The school has received a mail package from a man who claimed to be one of the construction workers involved in the planetarium project.

I read the news article in Apple Daily Newspaper a few days ago about some repair technicians discovering some bones. That reminded me of an incident that happened 5 years ago.

During Phase 1 of the construction work of the planetarium, we discovered a skeleton one day. We did not dig the whole thing up because our supervisor said that the school would sue our company if we could not meet the deadline.

We just left the skeleton buried underground and pulled down the unfinished planetarium. That was why the location of your existing planetarium was slightly adjusted from the original plan. We did not want to build the planetarium on top of the bones.



2. Students discussed the same set of questions used in Pre-task 2 and shared answers in pairs, in groups and individually.

Examples of students' answers

Whose bones were they?

• an animal in the world which scientist not yet found; a big lizard never found by people • a puzzle/ a trick set up by secondary school students • fake bones (they are white and clean, skeleton in mud can't be like that) • someone used some white paint to draw on the soil • 3D paintings • a huge crocodile (dinosaur is bigger than the school)

Why were the bones there? What happened?

• Someone from Komodo Island brought the Komodo Dragon to Shatin because Shatin was a farmland before and it died • There was a river, the dinosaur came to drink water and was drowned. • People from ancient time hunted the animal and forgot to eat it. After thousands of years, it became fossils • Maybe the worker who sent the information to the school tried to play a trick on the school because he was angry or he wanted money.

How should we start the investigation?

1. Ask the experts/search for information
 - Invite professor of HK History Museum to find out what it is, the use of land before the school was built
 - Ask police and CSI officers to check the DNA of the dinosaur and we would know what kind of animal it was
 - Contact DNA professor in the university to find out the DNA in the bones
 - Search reliable websites (e.g. Ming Pao, SCMP; National Geographic magazine, National History Museum) on the internet
2. Ask people who may know what happened
 - (i) the worker who took the picture • the construction company • the principal • contact the former principal through teachers
 - (ii) Put the news 'Skeleton found in school campus' in newspapers to let Hong Kong people know what is happening. Those who know what happened might contact the school.

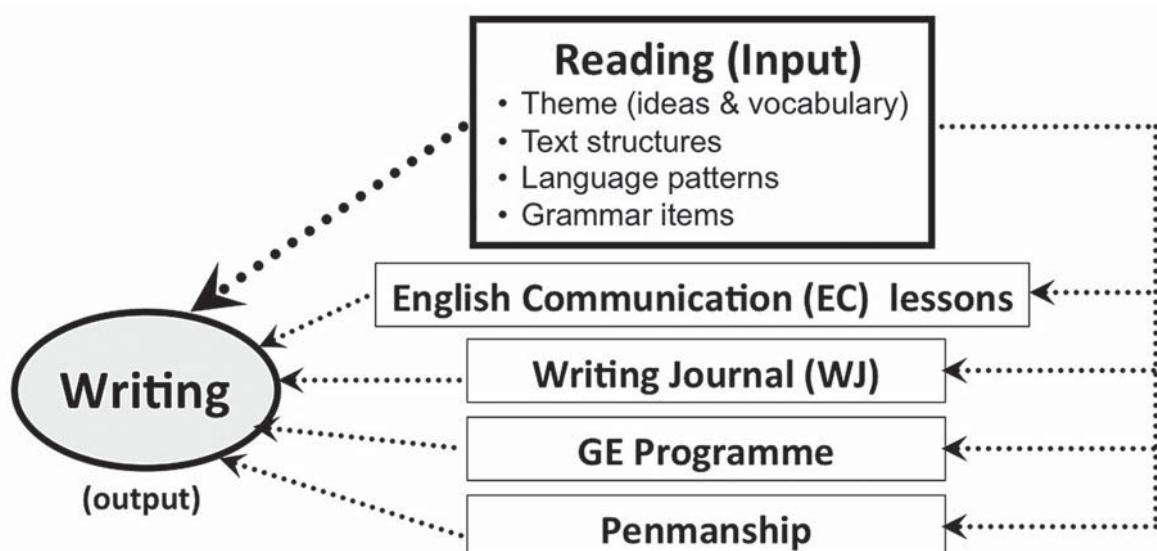
Writing: Journal entries – Skeleton under the Planetarium

Students wrote journal entries about the inquiry process.

The following table shows the alignment of different components in the P4 English Language curriculum and how independent learning was promoted among students:

Improvement of the coherence of the school-based curriculum

Writing was the main focus of curriculum planning. Reading was systematically incorporated into various components in the English Language curriculum to serve as input for students' writing as shown below:



Inclusion of independent learning in the curriculum

Based on students' readiness, interests and learning profiles, an extension activities menu was designed to extend students' learning beyond the contents of each unit. Options of independent learning activities were given to students to:

- (i) extend or enrich the core knowledge and skills of the unit
- (ii) challenge higher ability students
- (iii) address the diverse needs of students in terms of abilities, interests or learning styles
- (iv) encourage the development of independent learning skills

An example of an extension activities menu is shown below:

The Extension activities menu

<p>Activity 1 Draw or collect photographs of other electrical appliances which Milo can use to make his machine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - label the electrical appliances - give reasons why those electrical appliances can be used to make the machine - explain how those electrical materials can be used 	<p>Activity 2 Design a new machine (draw or make models)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - label the parts - state the functions of the machine - write the instructions on how to use the machine 	<p>Activity 3 Write a letter to Milo and suggest what he can do next and how he can improve his device.</p>
<p>Activity 4 Create a story board for Milo's story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - add speech bubbles - write a brief description for each picture 	<p>STUDENT CHOICE</p>	<p>Activity 5 Read the biography of an inventor and find out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what his/ her invention is - what inspired him/her to invent the product
<p>Activity 6 Search the internet to find some interesting inventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the invention? - What is the purpose of the inventions? Are they intended to solve some problems, for fun or for other purposes? - Where did their inspirations come from? 	<p>Activity 7 Housing problem is a social issue in HK.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch the video clip in YouTube. 2. Look for other ideas from YouTube, newspaper, internet which may help to solve the housing problem in HK. 3. Write about why that design may work in HK 	<p>Activity 8 Housing problem is a social issue in HK</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch the video clip in YouTube. 2. How could you utilize a 200 sq ft flat?

Impact

Curriculum level

1. There is a clear direction for the school to design a challenging curriculum for students by including KS3 and KS4 knowledge and skills and infusing the three core gifted elements.
2. The framework of infusing the three core gifted elements in the curriculum has been established (Diagram 1).
3. The alignment of different components in the English curriculum enhanced the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The learning goals were clearer. A framework for lesson planning was developed.
4. As students needed to bring in ideas from different disciplines in the learning process and explore a topic in greater depth, the breadth and depth of the curriculum were increased (Diagram 2).

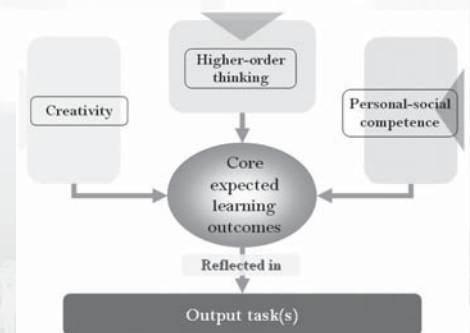


Diagram 1

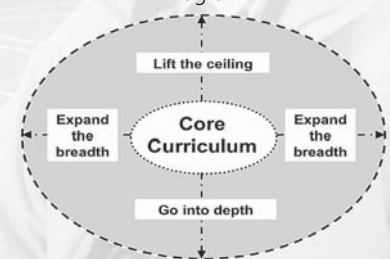


Diagram 2

Teacher level

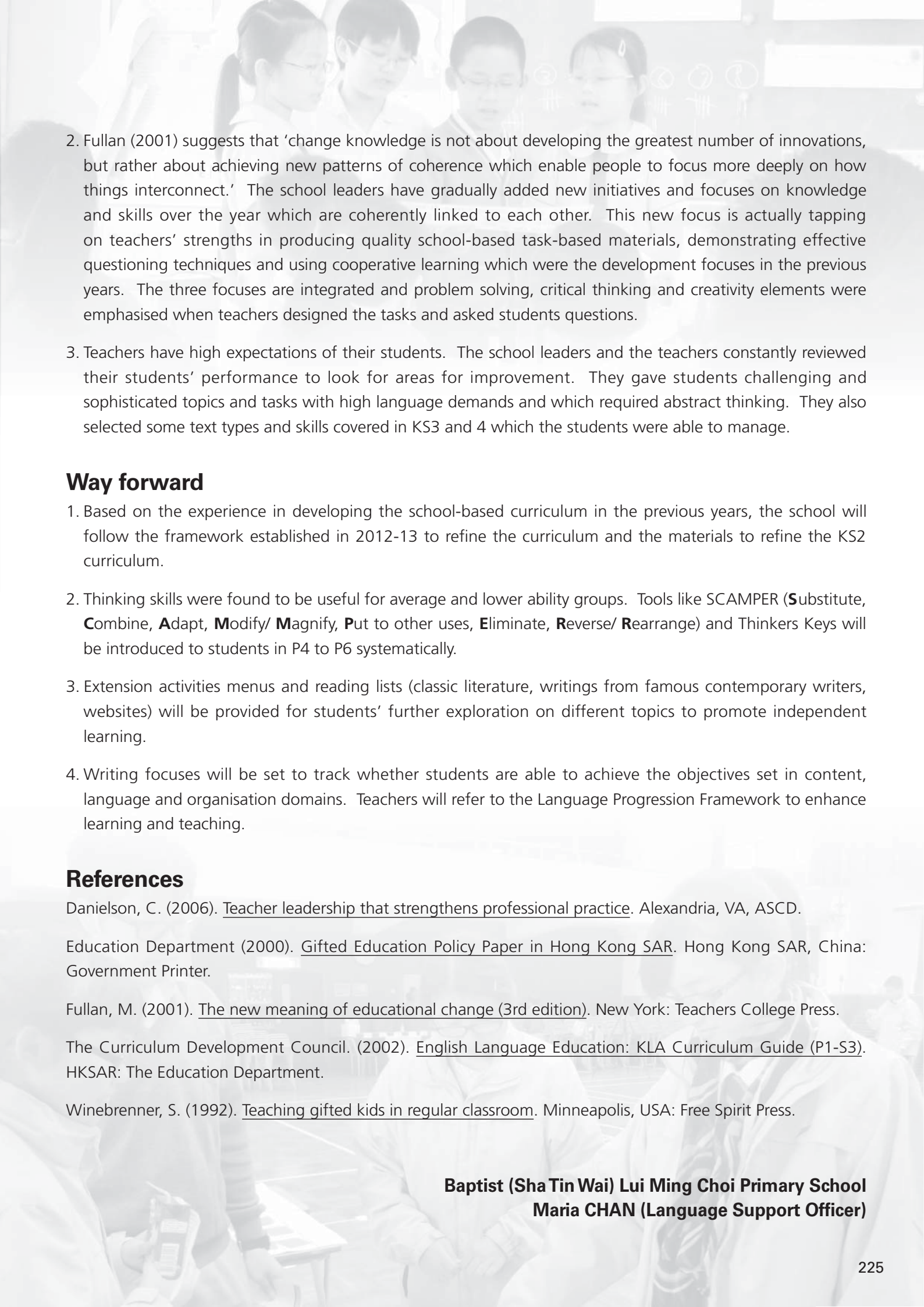
1. Teachers studied KS4 curriculum documents and gained a clear idea of what students should achieve at the end of secondary education.
2. Teachers realised that by setting tasks which allowed students to show their creativity, and by bringing in knowledge from other disciplines (e.g. Literacy, Science, Visual Arts, Mathematics, IT, Geography, History and Social Issues etc.), they were able to tap students' potential.
3. Teachers learned to apply questioning techniques (e.g. asking probing questions) and increase their interactions with students. In the teaching process, teachers also learned to support relatively weaker students who were very creative but failed to express brilliant ideas by helping them to rephrase their ideas in a more effective way.
4. Teachers noticed that the core gifted elements benefited all students. They identified five effective strategies which could also help the lower and average groups of students:
 - (i) setting pre-tasks to scaffold learning for the main task
 - (ii) teaching students some thinking tools systematically
 - (iii) allowing time for students to do home reading to get to know more about the topics;
 - (iv) asking probing questions
 - (v) providing a stress free environment for students to interact with the teachers and the other students in the classroom

Student level

1. Collaborative learning, interactions between teacher and students or students and students and the probing questions asked by teachers successfully promoted an inquiry approach among students. Students modified and refined their answers after listening to and being challenged or questioned by their classmates and teachers before ideas were presented to the class or before they did their writing.
2. Students' ideas in their writing were more creative. Most of them were able to elaborate their ideas with strong points.
3. Students were encouraged to read various materials (e.g. websites, books, magazines) after classes and apply knowledge from different disciplines. They were able to synthesise knowledge from various subject areas coherently and creatively. They also learned to work more independently by conducting research and exploring a topic from different perspectives.

Facilitating factors

1. The school has established a culture of learning how to improve. Openness to exploring better ways of doing things and to change is a norm in the school. The school constantly seeks to develop teachers' knowledge and the skills required to create effective new learning experiences for students. Teachers have adopted the practice of making continuous improvement. Teachers did not confine themselves to the KS2 curriculum. Before and while developing the curriculum, the panel head and the teachers read and made reference to the KS3 and KS4 curriculum documents (e.g. assessment criteria of S3 TSA, KS3 BC descriptors, Language Progression Framework and HKDSE Writing Marking Guidelines) so that they could have a more holistic view of the English Language curriculum from KS1 to KS4.

- 
2. Fullan (2001) suggests that 'change knowledge is not about developing the greatest number of innovations, but rather about achieving new patterns of coherence which enable people to focus more deeply on how things interconnect.' The school leaders have gradually added new initiatives and focuses on knowledge and skills over the year which are coherently linked to each other. This new focus is actually tapping on teachers' strengths in producing quality school-based task-based materials, demonstrating effective questioning techniques and using cooperative learning which were the development focuses in the previous years. The three focuses are integrated and problem solving, critical thinking and creativity elements were emphasised when teachers designed the tasks and asked students questions.
 3. Teachers have high expectations of their students. The school leaders and the teachers constantly reviewed their students' performance to look for areas for improvement. They gave students challenging and sophisticated topics and tasks with high language demands and which required abstract thinking. They also selected some text types and skills covered in KS3 and 4 which the students were able to manage.

Way forward

1. Based on the experience in developing the school-based curriculum in the previous years, the school will follow the framework established in 2012-13 to refine the curriculum and the materials to refine the KS2 curriculum.
2. Thinking skills were found to be useful for average and lower ability groups. Tools like SCAMPER (**S**ubstitute, **C**ombine, **A**dapt, **M**odify/ **M**agnify, **P**ut to other uses, **E**liminate, **R**everse/ **R**earrange) and Thinkers Keys will be introduced to students in P4 to P6 systematically.
3. Extension activities menus and reading lists (classic literature, writings from famous contemporary writers, websites) will be provided for students' further exploration on different topics to promote independent learning.
4. Writing focuses will be set to track whether students are able to achieve the objectives set in content, language and organisation domains. Teachers will refer to the Language Progression Framework to enhance learning and teaching.

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Challenging students to think and discuss critically through News Circles

Background

Discussions of news articles are often held in class. News articles contain social issues and current news topics which are controversial and can be rich learning resources for students to conduct a group discussion. Discussion of news promotes peer learning and stimulates students' thinking. Participating actively in a discussion requires students to apply effective discussion skills. However, discussion skills can be difficult to many students since spontaneous responses and a good knowledge of news topics are needed in the discussion process. From teachers' observations, many students tend to give unnatural mini-presentations instead of holding a real discussion and responding to each other's views. It is therefore necessary for teachers to train their students to use discussion skills and prepare them well before holding a discussion. To improve students' discussion skills and help them think critically about an issue, teachers of CNEC Christian College tried out News Circles with their S1 students.

Level

S1

Strategies used

To enhance students' discussion skills, teachers used the following strategies to help students:

1. Motivating students to take an active part in discussion by assigning different roles such as discussion leader, summariser, connection maker, word wizard and investigator to them
2. Choosing news articles which are controversial enough for discussion and of interest to students
3. Teaching students how to ask good discussion questions by modelling the thinking process
4. Training students how to use discussion language through playing games
5. Preparing a training package using video clips to illustrate their teaching points
6. Giving timely feedback after each discussion

What happened

News Circles were tried out over a period of two years. The following table shows the details for the tryout in the first year:

Lesson	Content
1	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Features of a news story• Making predictions and inferences using headlines, photos and captions• Concept of News Circles

2	<p>Explaining roles 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summariser • Word wizard • Connection maker
3	<p>Explaining roles 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigator • Discussion leader
4	Setting discussion guidelines and practising language expressions for discussions
5	<p>Application and feedback 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing issues relating to the Zheng Sheng College incident • Conducting group reflection and helping students reflect on their learning
6	<p>Application and feedback 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing the topic “Installing speed limiters in minibuses” • Reviewing the social skills students need during discussions
7	Watching video clips of students’ discussion to identify good discussion skills
8	<p>Application and feedback 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing the topic “Throwing objects from height” • Providing feedback on how discussion leaders can deal with different difficult situations during discussions
9	<p>Application and feedback 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing the topic “Child neglect” • Reinforcing note-taking skills by teaching students how to use sticky notes to record their observations and feelings
10	<p>Application and feedback 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing the topic “Cyber crime” • Conducting group reflection
11-12	Preparing for the City Forum project
13-14	City Forum

Based on the experiences gained in piloting News Circles in the first year, teachers made different revisions and re-organised the structure of the programme. Three major changes were made:

1. Producing a tailor-made training package for the project

To prepare material for a training package for students, teachers wrote some play scripts and asked students to do a role play. The clips provided examples of good and poor performance in discussions. Examples of common problems included failing to ask follow-up questions, lacking the initiative to respond, not being able to listen to the members' responses actively, etc. In addition to the clips, all worksheets, lesson plans, and evaluation notes were well documented in the package to ensure sustainability.

2. Focusing on the key discussion skills to be improved

Instead of teaching students a wide variety of discussion skills, teachers chose to focus on three: how to agree and disagree with evidence and good reasons given; how to ask follow-up questions and how to tackle an issue from different perspectives.

3. Accelerating the pace of learning by skipping the roles

After observing students for the first year, teachers found that their students were able to discuss without using the roles to help them. In order to run the discussion lessons more smoothly, they decided not to use roles in the discussion.

Impact

• Applying discussion skills effectively

With the use of specific roles (i.e. discussion leader, summariser, investigator, connection maker and word wizard) in News Circles, students were able to perform their assigned tasks successfully and interact naturally with each other. Students were also more able to ask appropriate follow-up questions and respond better to other group members' opinions. Besides, the use of video clips which showed examples of poor and good discussions was very effective as it drew students' attention to the targeted discussion skills.

• Thinking about an issue from various perspectives

In interviews, students reflected that by playing the roles in the City Forum, they learned that different parties thought differently about the same issue. It is important that students understand each party in the City Forum has its own interests. They learned how to defend their own position using arguments. For example, in the debriefing session after the role play, students reflected that the major responsibility for child neglect lay with parents, rather than with the government, despite the fact that they raised the issue of insufficient government support.

• Asking good questions in a discussion

A lot of time was spent on teaching students how to set good questions for discussion. Teachers understood that if questions were limited to checking comprehension, there might not be room for members to comment, discuss or even argue. So, quite a lot of time was spent on guiding students to improve their questions. As a result, students were able to ask more open-ended questions which stimulated other group members' thinking.

A background image showing a group of students in a classroom. Some are looking at a screen, others are talking. The image is faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Facilitating factors

Like any other initiative, the success of News Circles depends on team spirit. At this school, a team of three dedicated teachers was formed to pilot this project. They shared a drive to improve their teaching and their students' learning. Every time they finished a lesson, they shared information about its effectiveness. They would find out what worked best in teaching. For example, they found out that teaching students to ask follow up questions was more challenging than teaching students to disagree with evidence. So immediately they re-ordered the lessons in other classes. Their commitment to and enthusiasm for the project implementation were certainly the key to success.

The second success factor is systematic scaffolding of the learning process. Before actual implementation, teachers anticipated the difficulties that students might face and took precautions to prevent them. For example, teachers adapted all the news articles to suit students' ability level. Then they recorded the articles and put them in the e-class so that students knew how to pronounce the difficult words. To teach students how to ask good questions for discussion, teachers demonstrated their thinking process in class and gave immediate feedback to all questions set by the students. The scaffolding process thus helped students to understand the news articles better.

The third success factor is the adoption of the EPIE (Evaluation, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation) cycle. The second year's work was based on a critical review of the first year's work. Each step taken was based on careful scrutiny of the learning and teaching process and feedback from students and teachers. This on-going evaluation process helped teachers run the programme more smoothly in the second year.

Difficulties and suggestions

There were several difficulties in piloting News Circles. First, teachers did not have enough time to find the right news topics for the discussion. Since the news articles had to meet some criteria, teachers needed to spend extra time to find the right ones for adaptation. Also, teachers had to put much effort into teaching students how to listen actively. Many students tended to respond to others' comments only by agreeing or disagreeing. To teach them how to ask follow-up questions, teachers encouraged students to be very focused and pay full attention to what group members were saying.

To tackle the above problems, teachers needed extra manpower from the school to help. For example, with all the selection criteria in mind, the teaching assistant helped them find the right news articles for adaptation. To help students ask follow-up questions, it is suggested that teachers focus on teaching two skills: asking questions to clarify meaning and asking a member to elaborate more on an idea. By breaking down the skills, they will show students that they can respond to each other in different ways.

Way forward

The school will continue to train students' discussion skills using their own training package. Video clips and timely feedback help students to reflect on their own performance and give clear examples of what should be said or what should be improved. It is hoped that the school will continue to modify the project and try to implement it in senior forms. To conclude, discussion skills are not inborn; but they can be trained through systematic demonstration and practice.



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CNEC Christian College
Cassandra TSONG (Language Support Officer)

Infusing thinking skills and values into task-based units in the Compulsory Part: An alternative approach to prepare students at senior secondary level to meet the demands of the HKDSE

Background

At senior secondary level, students are expected to infer meaning using contextual clues, express personal views with reasons, follow or present arguments, and compare alternative views. Such processes require the application of thinking skills, and an ability to identify values and multiple perspectives. To help students meet such a challenge, teachers of Wong Shiu Chi Secondary School decided to infuse thinking skills and values into some units in the Compulsory Part to help students cope with the requirements of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). Teachers also wanted to create more meaningful English learning experiences for students to support their development of more advanced reading and writing skills.

Level

S4

Strategies used

The following strategies were adopted by teachers in the task-based units - “The Mind” and “Getting it Right”:

Strategy	Unit: “The Mind”	Unit: “Getting it Right”
Systematically infusing thinking skills in the Compulsory Part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring gender stereotypes and debunking myths Forming a valid argument with evidence given Comparing and contrasting viewpoints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying causes, problems and solutions Identifying multiple perspectives Working out creative solutions by looking at issues from multiple perspectives and presenting them in a logical sequence
Using graphic organisers to provide a framework to help students organise ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venn diagrams Compare-and-contrast charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem-solution flow charts Graphic organisers to identify different stakeholders’ views
Including positive values and attitudes in task-based units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at an issue objectively Attaching importance to evidence-based statements Reflecting on and valuing gender differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being open to different viewpoints before making a judgement Being open and creative in working out solutions

What happened

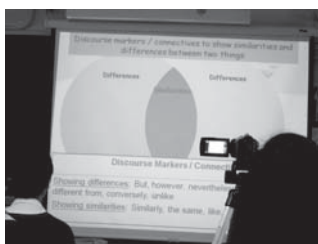
Unit: "The Mind"

No. of lessons: 16-18

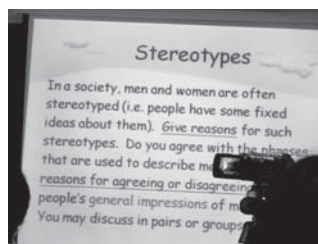
Major pre-task activity

Lead-in activities: Men are from Mars and women are from Venus

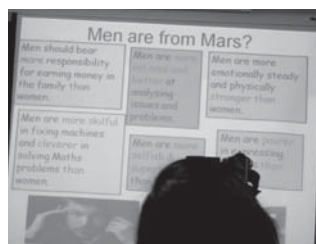
1. Students learned the objectives, context and purpose of the unit.
2. As a lead-in activity, students discussed gender stereotypes in groups and expressed their views with reasons.
3. Teachers demonstrated to students how to make a comparison using a Venn diagram and use related language patterns to express similarities and differences.
4. Teachers asked students to work in groups and discuss their views on gender differences in different areas with evidence and reasons given. Students then reported their answers in class. Students then gave reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with their peers' views.



A Venn diagram shown to students



Asking students to think about gender stereotypes



Common beliefs and misconceptions about males and females



Students working in groups to discuss gender stereotypes

Pre-task activities: Gender gaps in the brain

5. Students learned to distinguish between facts and opinions. They read an information text about research findings on gender differences in the brain and identified examples of facts and informed opinions.
6. Teachers drew their attention to some important semantic features and useful sentence patterns in the text.
7. Teachers then used different questions to help students deconstruct the text and work out the main idea of each paragraph. Students then made use of a Venn diagram to identify the gender differences stated in the text.
8. Students learned the style, tone and language features of a formal report such as a scientific report, and the differences between a formal report and an informal report.

Pre-task activities: Thinking about other gender differences and similarities

9. Students brainstormed some common phobias of males and females. Students read another text about females' phobias that explains gender differences from a biological viewpoint. Using the examples from the text, teachers taught students how to make use of evidence to support one's claims.

10. Students learned some debating skills such as how to form a valid argument, use persuasive language and provide examples and facts as evidence to support one's claims.
11. More able students had to read more information texts about gender differences in class to explore whether girls perform better in school than boys. Students worked in groups to form arguments for or against the motion in class. Each group presented their arguments and used evidence mentioned in the materials to support their claims.
12. Average and less able students brainstormed gender differences in their performance which they had observed in different areas in school. Students then prepared their debating speeches before participating in a mini-debate on the motion "Girls Are Doing Better Than Boys in School" in class. Students were assigned different roles – captains and debaters in the two debating teams, floor speakers, audience who voted for the best speakers and judges.



Students playing different roles to present their arguments and make rebuttals



A floor speaker presenting her points in a debate held in class



A speaker in one of the debating teams presenting his arguments and evidence in a debate

Final task

Individual students had to make use of a graphic organiser to brainstorm arguments for or against the motion used in the mini-debate. Each had to write a debating speech with evidence included to express their stance on the given motion.

Unit: "Getting It Right"

No. of lessons: 16-18

Major pre-task activity

Lead-in activities – What should we do in a catastrophe?

1. Students learned the objectives, context and purpose of the unit.
2. Students brainstormed different natural disasters or catastrophes in Hong Kong and in the world. Teachers asked students the possible steps to take in those situations to solve problems and introduced flow charts to them.
3. Students learned useful connectives, signal words and sentence patterns to talk about the steps to take. They then matched the headlines with the news about some natural disasters.

Pre-task activities: What should we do in daily emergency cases?

4. Students worked in groups to discuss the actions to be taken by different parties (e.g. parents, principal, teachers and students) in a given emergency case on the school campus and gave reasons to justify their answers.
5. As a pre-reading activity, students were given an information gap activity. They were given role cards with different emergency cases taken from a text. In pairs, students read out the emergency cases to their partners. Their partners had to find the steps or actions to take using the prompts given. More able students had to jot down notes to show the steps or actions to take in order to solve the problems.
6. Students then read the texts in the textbook and completed comprehension questions. They learned how to guess meanings of new words from contextual clues.
7. Students revised modal verbs and imperatives. For more practice, they read some news about accidents or emergency cases and worked out the proper actions to take using modal verbs and imperatives.

Pre-task activities: Exploring multiple perspectives to solve problems

8. Teachers demonstrated how to explore multiple perspectives using controversial issues.
9. Students explored views of different parties and suggested possible actions to be taken by different parties in those situations. They gave reasons for why different parties should take those actions.

Final writing task

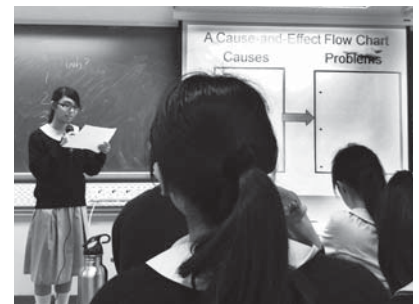
10. To explore different actions to be taken by various parties to ease air pollution, students had to write an article for a writing competition held by the Green Society of the school on the topic "Easing air pollution in Hong Kong". As a pre-writing activity, students made use of flow charts to think of different actions to be taken by different parties and gave reasons. Less able students focused on the actions to be taken by only two different parties whereas more able students worked on multiple perspectives of more parties.



Students working in groups to explore different points of view



A graphic organiser to help students adopt multiple perspectives



A student presenting the points included in her graphic organiser

Impact

- Two surveys were conducted with students upon completion of the two units. Based on the qualitative and quantitative findings, S4 students indicated that they showed improvement in their reading and writing skills and confidence in the language skills.
- For reading, 94.5% of S4 students agreed or strongly agreed that they learned to identify similarities and differences in reading English texts. 90.3% of them found that they had more confidence in reading English texts about making a comparison.
- 97.7% of them agreed or strongly agreed that they learned to describe different procedures and actions. 96.6% of them found that they showed more confidence in reading descriptions of different procedures / actions to take.
- For writing, 90.9% of S4 students found that they had more ideas for making a comparison in their writing. 85.2% of them agreed or strongly agreed that they gained more confidence in making a comparison in their writing.
- 94.9% of them found that they had more confidence in including different procedures/actions in English writing.
- In the surveys, S4 students were asked to reflect on their learning. They included such comments as “meaningful”, “I can apply it in the future”, “it is useful for my communication [with others] in the future”, “it can improve my writing”, “it’s useful for me in writing tasks”, “I can analyse things orderly and it is useful for my future career”, “it can help me present my ideas clear[ly]”, “very interesting”, “I have more confidence to write procedures, that’s great”.
- In general, students were able to follow arguments and formulate their own arguments with relevant evidence and examples included in the unit “The Mind”. They became more aware of some gender stereotypes and could debunk those myths. They learned to form a more objective view on gender differences and avoid bias.
- In general, students were able to explore multiple perspectives and viewpoints. They were able to suggest creative solutions to solve problems and present them with reasons and in a logical sequence.
- Teachers designed a variety of student-centred activities in the task-based units. They developed confidence and professional skills in using a task-based framework to plan and implement teaching and learning activities at senior secondary level. They also successfully infused thinking skills into selected task-based units to help students cope with more challenging reading or writing tasks in the HKDSE.



A student identifying gender differences with examples and evidence

Module 6 Getting it right
Pre-writing task 2

Name: _____ () Class: _____ Date: _____

Complete the following graphic organizer with reference to the articles given and your own ideas.

Causes	Problems (Provide information showing the seriousness of the problem)	Views of different stakeholders	Solutions
		1.	
		2.	
		3.	
		4.	

A flow chart to help students identify causes, problems, multiple perspectives and solutions

Facilitating factors

1. Teachers putting emphasis on the creation of meaningful English learning experiences in their unit design

At the planning and implementation stages, senior form teachers saw the importance of creating more opportunities for students to undergo meaningful English learning experiences instead of just relying on practice. They adopted a task-based framework and infused thinking skills and values into some English units in the Compulsory Part. Various interesting pre-task activities were designed to scaffold student learning in a systematic manner. A variety of student-centred activities such as debates, discussion tasks and individual oral presentations were conducted in class. In the learning process, students were given much autonomy to express their personal views on some given issues and a lot of opportunities to apply the target thinking and language skills.

2. Setting specific learning outcomes for reading and writing to assess student learning

S4 students were given clear success criteria based on the learning outcomes in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) when they were asked to apply thinking skills, identify evaluative comments, follow an argument or a point of view, and compare alternative views in doing various reading and writing tasks. Teachers made reference to the Learning Progression Framework to set clear expected learning outcomes for reading and writing so as to evaluate students' progress in the targeted language and thinking skills. They were able to find out whether their teaching was effective or not based on whether students were able to achieve the expected outcomes at the end of the units.

Conclusion and suggestions

Teachers found that the pre-task activities, thinking and language skills and values covered in the units could help students cope with the language demands of the HKDSE and NSS Curriculum. Such unit design can help students tackle questions related to the identification of different viewpoints, the need to follow an argument in reading, developing one's own argument in writing, suggesting actions and solutions to problems and drawing logical conclusions in the HKDSE. Instead of relying on examination practice at senior secondary level, senior form teachers saw the value of designing task-based units and showed greater willingness to adopt task-based learning. To support a smoother interface between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, thinking skills and positive values should also be systematically infused into the junior secondary English Language curriculum.

Reference

The Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2007). English Language Education KLA: English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (S4-S6). HKSARG: The Education and Manpower Bureau.

Wong Shiu Chi Secondary School
Amy POON (Language Support Officer)