# Learning to Learn:
# In the classroom and beyond

## Background

The introduction of Learning to Learn 2.0 in 2014 and the review of the new academic structure marked an important milestone in local education. A clear direction for curriculum development was set - **focusing** on learning and teaching effectiveness, **deepening** the positive impact of the curriculum reform as well as **sustaining** the quality of learning. In the last two years, English teachers have responded proactively by building on the experiences and good practices generated in the previous phase of the curriculum reform and implementing a wide array of curriculum initiatives such as e-learning, self-directed learning and Reading across the Curriculum (RaC). This edition of the compendium captures schools' valuable experiences of making use of different initiatives to improve their school-based English Language curricula, enhance the professional capacity and leadership of the teachers and stretch the learning potential and performance of their students to meet their learning and future needs.

## Theme one: Building the foundation: Developing students' basic skills through tailored curriculum planning

1. **Conducting holistic curriculum planning for a smooth interface between key stages**

   To enable our students to become self-directed and lifelong learners, it is imperative that they possess a firm English language foundation so that they can use different language skills to explore, acquire and construct knowledge by themselves. To this end, a comprehensive and balanced coverage of language knowledge, skills and attitudes at each level and across levels is essential. This requires making vertical and horizontal alignment in planning the curriculum and designing learning tasks. Case 4.1 illustrates how teachers were able to make good use of the Basic Competency Descriptors to review and plan the speaking curriculum progressively. They also ensured that their students could be exposed to different related text types. In Cases 4.2 and 4.3, a wide coverage of text type features was ensured in the school-based listening and writing curricula. Case 4.4 shows that the formal and informal curricula were coherently connected to broaden students' practical knowledge about camping and enhance their thinking and problem-solving skills. The school-based reading curriculum in Case 4.5 was also planned in a progressive manner, so that relatively less proficient S1 students could gradually master the target reading skills and strategies.

2. **Providing targeted support to address the specific needs of students**

   When it comes to addressing the root of individual students' learning problems, teachers need a fuller understanding of how serious the problems are and how much diversity exists among students. The use of frameworks and tools such as the Learning Progression Framework and diagnostic tests can help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and set specific and attainable outcomes for different groups of students. Adoption of appropriate teaching strategies and tasks, e.g. explicit teaching of language skills and experiential learning tasks, can help different target groups make improvement progressively or stretch their potential. As illustrated in Cases 4.1 and 4.2, teachers were able to make informed decisions based on the findings of pre- and post-tests, and devise appropriate remedial measures and types of activities to improve their students' performance in speaking and listening. Case 4.3 demonstrates how teachers made good use of the Learning Progression Framework as a reference tool to review students' performance in writing. Teachers in Case 4.4 made use of experiential learning (i.e. setting up real camps) to help students develop more creative ideas in writing. Case 1.5 shows how specific and attainable outcomes in reading were carefully selected by teachers for the less proficient students to attain.

## Theme two: Moving towards independence: Developing classroom practices which promote student autonomy

1. **Developing students' independent learning skills across key stages**

   Developing learner independence can start as early as Key Stage 1. Teachers can create suitable conditions (e.g. an enabling environment for students to demonstrate their learning and celebrate their achievements) for students, and equip them with relevant strategies and skills (e.g. goal-setting, self-management skills and an ability to reflect on their own learning strategies and performance) at different stages. Case 4.6 is a good example to show how teachers adopted a progressive approach to fostering independent writing among KS1 students using a structured model. Case 4.7 illustrates how students were given different tasks such as note-taking, enquiry learning and self-reflection tasks to progress gradually towards learner independence. Case 4.8 shows how teachers systematically designed vocabulary building activities such as asking students to discuss preferred learning strategies and completing the learning contracts to develop their independent study skills. Case 4.9 demonstrates how students were empowered to assume greater responsibility for achieving deeper learning of the Drama elective module through flipped learning.

2. **Developing learner independence in the digital landscape**

   e-learning is also a new and worthwhile area to be explored in the promotion of students' independent learning. As digital content is readily available at our fingertips nowadays and the use of the Internet and e-tools is ubiquitous inside and outside the classroom, the digital world has fundamentally and irrevocably altered how teachers teach and how students learn. Teachers can embrace the new digital reality by taking advantage of e-tools in daily learning, teaching and assessments. For example, e-tools can be used for assessing students and addressing learner diversity in class. As reflected by some of the school cases in this part, teachers successfully piloted the effective use of e-tools and also broadened their students' repertoire of e-learning in the process. In Case 4.8, teachers effectively utilised smartphone applications and encouraged their students to use some e-tools to acquire new vocabulary. Case 4.9 shows that teachers made conscientious efforts in enhancing their repertoire of e-learning strategies and fostered formative assessment practices through e-tools.

## Theme three: Reading to learn: Making connections in learning through Reading across the Curriculum

1. **Every teacher as a teacher of reading to support students' literacy across subjects**

   Understanding content subject texts can often pose a major challenge to many of our students, especially relatively weaker students. Not only English teachers but also content subject teachers have a pivotal role to play in supporting students' literacy development. The challenge of students' poor understanding of content subject texts can be better overcome through collaboration between English and content subject teachers in fostering RaC. Both parties can map out essential subject-specific vocabulary, reading skills, text-types and text structures, and jointly plan and implement RaC inside and outside the classroom. Case 4.10 shows how English teachers and the librarian made concerted efforts in helping students read books from different disciplines. Case 4.11 illustrates how English and content subject teachers worked together to identify subject-specific vocabulary building and reading skills to help the less proficient students decode texts in content subject lessons. Case 4.12 explains how English and Integrated Humanities (IH) teachers made use of a cross-curricular project to help students read IH texts and apply cause and effect structures in report writing. English and Science teachers in Case 4.13 jointly developed a cross-curricular reading programme to enrich their students' science concepts and bolster their confidence in independent reading.

## 2. Progressive implementation of Reading across the Curriculum

However, being over-ambitious in implementing RaC especially at the pilot stage may be counterproductive. Schools can choose feasible and appropriate entry points based on their school-based contexts and teachers can reach consensus on a manageable scale and the most appropriate implementation mode. The "think big but start small" principle thus applies as teachers can pilot a project first and reflect on the school-based experiences before increasing the RaC initiative to a larger scale. Mapping out clear strategies to adopt and setting up an RaC committee to take charge of RaC will also greatly increase the chance of success. Different scales and different implementation modes were adopted in some of our collaborating schools. For example, teachers made use of a study tour learning programme (Case 4.10), LaC Days (Case 4.11), a field trip (Case 4.12) and a showcase (Case 4.13) to help students make connections between their learning inside and outside the classroom.

# Theme four: Looking towards the future: Integrating careers education and life skills

## 1. Infusing careers and life planning education into the school-based curriculum

Careers and life planning education is becoming indispensable and can be an integral part of the school-based curriculum to enable students to pursue their academic or career aspirations and achieve whole-person development. To promote it, teachers can make effective use of community resources and existing facilities to create authentic and experiential learning for their students. Case 4.14 shows how teachers coherently infused careers and life planning education into teaching units by arranging visits to restaurants, tourist spots and the airport to create career-related experiences for their students. Case 4.15 demonstrates how English teachers utilised their existing school facility, a well-equipped kitchen in the school, to provide an authentic situation for students to prepare and orally present their creative dishes and write food reviews.

## 2. Tapping students' potential through career and life planning education

Since every student is unique and possesses potential, teachers need to treat each one of them as an individual, understand their strengths and weak areas and develop each student's potential to the fullest. To do so, teachers can develop more sensitivity to individual students' specific needs including their interests, abilities and career preferences, and adapt the curriculum appropriately. Different activities and tools can be used to encourage students' self-understanding and reflection. Through career education and life planning, students can gain a clearer self-understanding, set achievable personal and career-related goals for actualisation and plan for their progression pathways at different stages of their lives. In this part, Case 4.14 shows how teachers made appropriate use of different tools such as questionnaires, reflection forms and personality tests to find out their students' interests and career aptitudes. In Case 4.16, senior form students were asked to do a personality survey to identify the types of jobs or studies suitable for them. They also researched information about possible career paths to gain a deeper understanding of their career aspirations.

# Conclusion

Inarguably, teachers play a very pivotal role in determining the success of the updated curriculum reform. Genuine change in the curriculum only occurs when teachers can constantly reflect on their teaching practices, refrain from being satisfied with superficial changes, view learning and teaching as a co-construction process, and truly and actively engage their students in deeper learning of the target knowledge and skills including learning to learn capabilities. Teachers also need a clear conviction that they themselves are lifelong learners too. With the growth of learning communities and networks among our English teachers in recent years, we are confident that the momentum of lifelong learning and change will continue.