Promoting self-directed learning to nurture independent writers

Background

With teachers' support, many students can write satisfactorily in their daily writing practices. However, some cannot maintain their writing standard when they write independently even if similar knowledge and skills are involved. Apart from supporting students through appropriate scaffolding, the teachers of LKWFSL Wong Yiu Nam Primary School see the need to improve students' ability to extend what has been learned from one context to new contexts. They would like to infuse self-directed learning (SDL) elements into the planning and implementation of their writing units so as to nurture more independent and proficient writers.

Levels

P4-6

Strategies used

Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p.18) . To engage students in this process, teachers adopted the following strategies:

Processes involved in self-directed learning	Strategies used
1. Diagnosing learning needs and setting learning goals	• Administering a writing pre-test and doing textual analysis of the writing pre-test scripts to diagnose students' specific learning needs • Setting learning goals for writing with students
2. Identifying learning strategies and/or resources	• Familiarising students with language and vocabulary related to a writing task at the pre-writing stage • Introducing strategies and/or resources at the pre-writing stage to empower students to apply their knowledge and skills in different writing contexts
3. Monitoring learning progress	• Adopting evaluation checklists for students to do ongoing monitoring of learning progress
4. Evaluating learning outcomes	• Evaluating students' performance at the post-writing stage to help students make plans for improving their writing

What happened

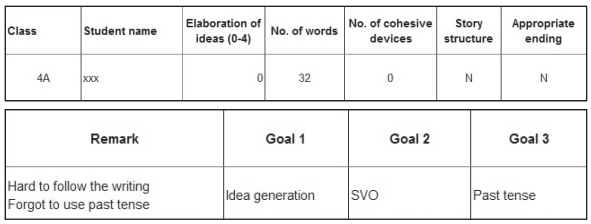
The following steps were taken in developing the school-based curriculum:

1. Infusing self-directed learning elements into writing tasks through holistic planning

The table below outlines the P4, P5 and P6 fiction and non-fiction writing tasks with elements of self-directed learning infused.

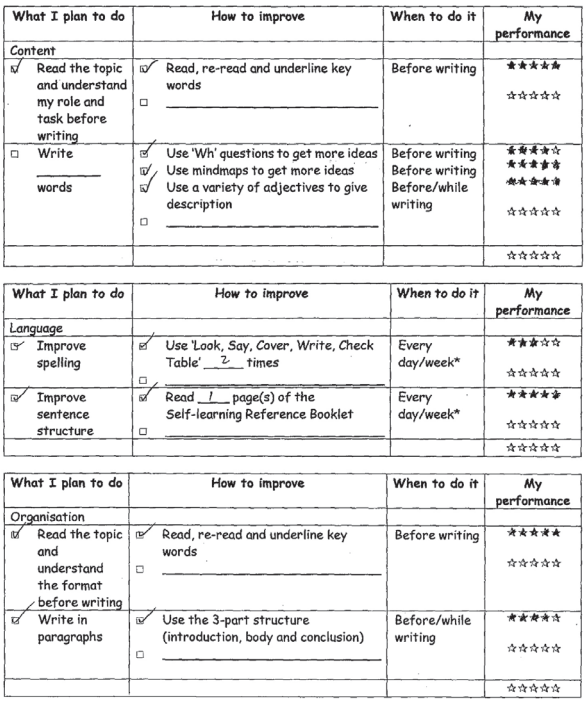
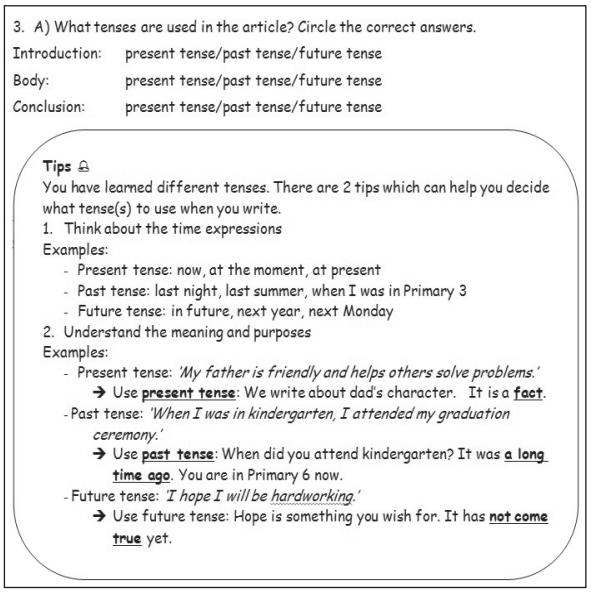
Levels	Text types	Topics	SDL capabilities
P4	- Fiction: Picture story - Non-fiction: Article	- Old Hong Kong - How to stay healthy	- Ability in identifying learning needs, setting learning goals and identifying learning strategies/resources - Ability in monitoring and assessing learning progress
P5	- Non-fiction: Email - Fiction: Picture story	- Travelling in Hong Kong - Lost in the country park	
P6	- Non-fiction: School newspaper article - Non-fiction: School newspaper article	- My ideal career - My best friend	

2. Adopting a variety of strategies to enhance students' self-directed learning capabilities and writing skills in a teacher-facilitated environment

SDL-related processes	Tasks	Artefacts
Diagnosing learning needs and setting learning goals	1. Conducting writing pre-tests and textual analysis • Why: With effective use of student learning data, teachers helped students identify their learning needs and select coping strategies. • How: - Writing pre-tests were administered to obtain an overview of students' performance in terms of content, language and organisation. - Teachers studied the scripts of students to identify the specific areas they were weak in. They also set preliminary learning goals which were shared with individual students.	 Teachers gave both qualitative and quantitative feedback and suggested learning goals to individual students.

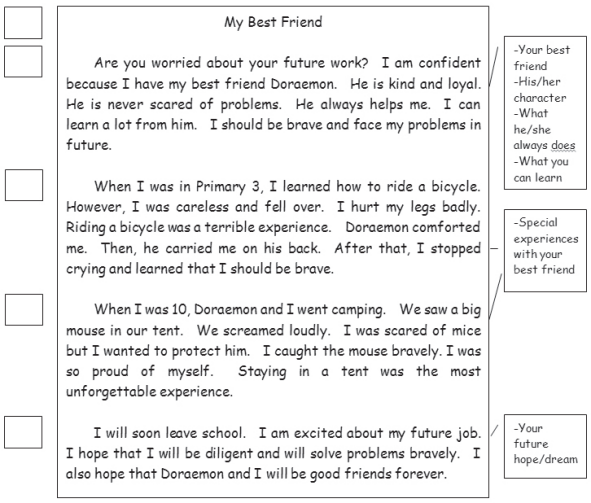
Class	Student name	Elaboration of ideas (0-4)	No. of words	No. of cohesive devices	Story structure	Appropriate ending
4A	xxx	0	32	0	N	N

Remark	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Hard to follow the writing Forgot to use past tense	Idea generation	SVO	Past tense

	2. Setting learning goals for writing with students • Why: Many students did not know what to improve in writing and how to improve. • How: Based on the preliminary goals suggested by teachers, students set individual writing goals and selected learning strategies to adopt over the school year. They made use of a goal setting checklist designed with reference to the writing pre-test analysis. Teachers then came up with five goals most students had selected: - Understanding the topic before writing - Generating more ideas - Improving organisation - Improving vocabulary - Improving basic sentence structure To support students to achieve their learning goals, most of the strategies suggested in the checklist for achieving the goals above were incorporated into the design of the writing units.	 Checklist for setting writing goals
Identifying learning strategies and/or resources	3. Familiarising students with language structures and vocabulary related to a writing task • Pre-writing stage - Doing scaffolding tasks • Why: Although the scaffolding of language and vocabulary alone is not enough to nurture independent writers, it is a necessary step to prepare students for writing and boost their confidence. • How: Scaffolding tasks were provided for reinforcement of the target vocabulary and language needed for a writing task. • When: Scaffolding was done at the pre-writing stage of all writing tasks.	 Students revised the use of tenses to prepare for a writing task.

	4. Introducing strategies and/or resources at the pre-writing stage to empower students to apply their knowledge and skills in different writing contexts • Pre-writing stage - Adopting the "RAFT" strategy · Why: Some students tended to write without thoroughly understanding the writing requirements. This often resulted in the wrong choice of story narrator and inappropriate text type features. · How: Students learned the strategy "RAFT" (**R**ole, **A**udience, **F**ormat and **T**opic) which is a writing strategy that helps them understand their roles as writers, the readership, the writing format and the topic. The strategy improved students' understanding of a writing topic. They were more aware that they should come up with relevant ideas and write with appropriate narration, tone and organisation. · When: This strategy was taught at the beginning of P4 and was reinforced throughout Key Stage 2 (KS2) in all writing units.	<table><tr><td>R Role I am a _____.</td><td>A Audience _____ and _____ will read my writing.</td><td>F Format This is an article in the _____ _____.</td><td>T Topic It is about _____.</td></tr></table> Students used the "RAFT" strategy to improve their understanding of a writing topic.

- Analysing reading texts
  - Why: Getting students to analyse the content, language and organisation of a model text can increase students' awareness of how to write better.
  - How: Teachers provided students with model texts with similar text structure to that of the writing task. Students read the reading input and extracted details from it to complete a mind map through which they learned how to structure their writing. A similar mind map was provided for students to plan their writing task, which facilitated them to apply what they had learned in the new writing context.
  - When: This strategy was used throughout KS2 in all writing units.



My Best Friend

Are you worried about your future work? I am confident because I have my best friend Doraemon. He is kind and loyal. He is never scared of problems. He always helps me. I can learn a lot from him. I should be brave and face my problems in future.

When I was in Primary 3, I learned how to ride a bicycle. However, I was careless and fell over. I hurt my legs badly. Riding a bicycle was a terrible experience. Doraemon comforted me. Then, he carried me on his back. After that, I stopped crying and learned that I should be brave.

When I was 10, Doraemon and I went camping. We saw a big mouse in our tent. We screamed loudly. I was scared of mice but I wanted to protect him. I caught the mouse bravely. I was so proud of myself. Staying in a tent was the most unforgettable experience.

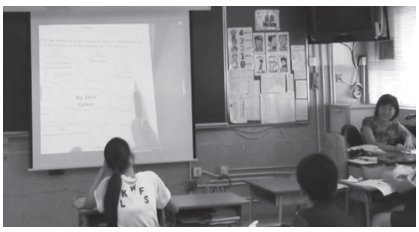
I will soon leave school. I am excited about my future job. I hope that I will be diligent and will solve problems bravely. I also hope that Doraemon and I will be good friends forever.

-Your best friend
-His/her character
-What he/she always does
-What you can learn

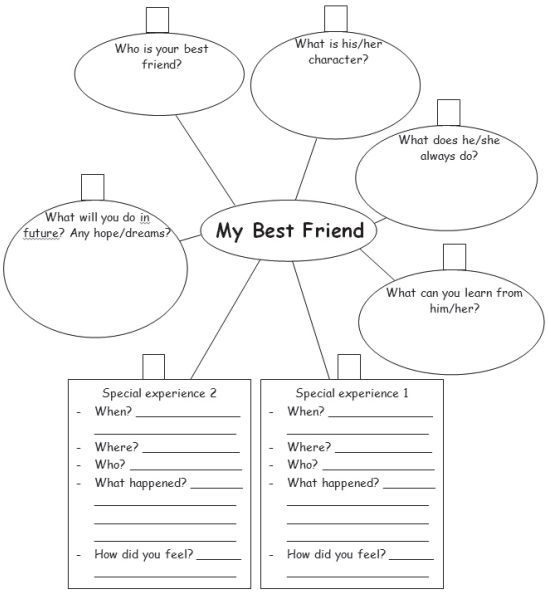
-Special experiences with your best friend

-Your future hope/dream

Students read a text with a similar structure to that of the writing task.

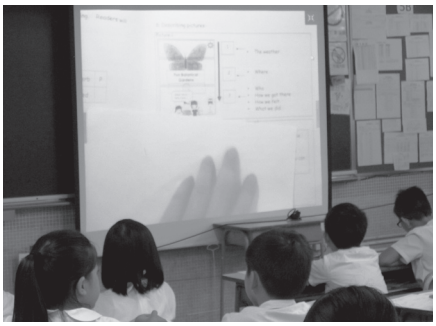


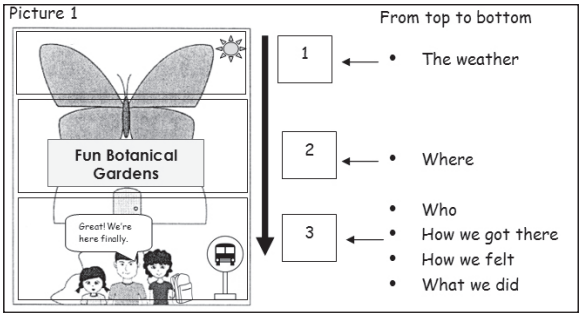
Students completed a mind map to represent the content and organisation of the reading input.



Students used a similar mind map to brainstorm ideas for their writing task.

- Analysing pictures for writing
  - Why: Many students were weak in generating ideas for picture stories. They tended to focus on part of a picture and ignore the rest of it.
  - How: Teachers guided students to describe pictures either from top to bottom or from left to right.
  - When: This step-by-step approach was piloted in P5 for picture story writing. It will be further promoted in other levels as this strategy can be used for most pictures and can help students describe a picture systematically and enrich their content.
- Doing home study worksheets
  - Why: Most students did not have much exposure to English after class and they lacked motivation to learn more English by themselves.
  - How: Teachers designed a variety of home study worksheets to enhance students' self-directed learning capabilities. The home study worksheets covered a range of tasks aiming at preparing students for their fiction and non-fiction writing tasks. Students learned more about a writing topic by reading materials provided in the home study worksheets. They also learned new vocabulary and sentence structures which can be used for their writing tasks.
  - When: Students completed the home study worksheets after class and then shared their work in class.





Students analysed a picture from top to bottom.

Students discussed their home study worksheets in class.

Home study worksheet

Read the article.

My Selfless Friend

I have a good friend but I do not know his name. I call him the Happy Prince. He is generous. He is a sincere friend who always helps people selflessly.

The Happy Prince saw poor people who got no food to eat. So, he asked me to take all his jewels. Then, they had money to buy food. He also saw a man who was sick. So, he asked me to take off the fine gold from his body. Then, the poor man had money to see the doctor. Finally, he got nothing left and nobody remembered him. He got old and sick. He was as weak as a kitten. I sang him a song to comfort him. I also flew near him to support him.

I will always remember the Happy Prince who tries the best to help others. I hope we will be friends forever.

Answer the following questions.

1. Who is the writer's good friend?

_____

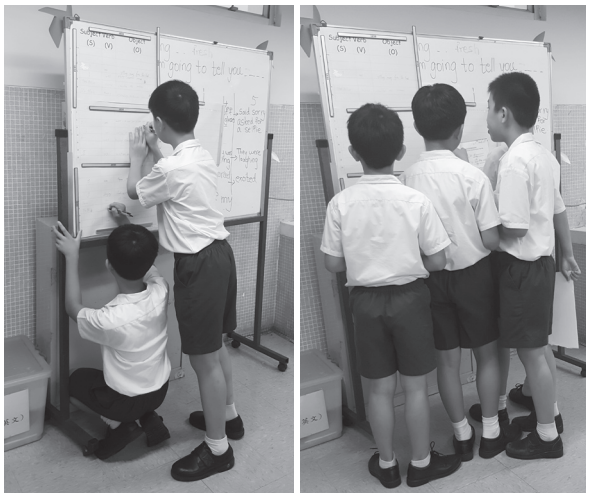
2. How does the writer describe the Happy Prince?

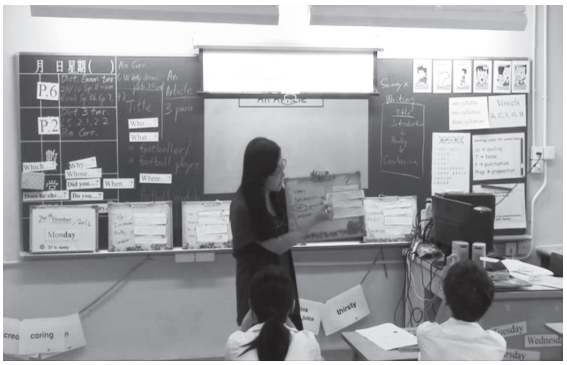
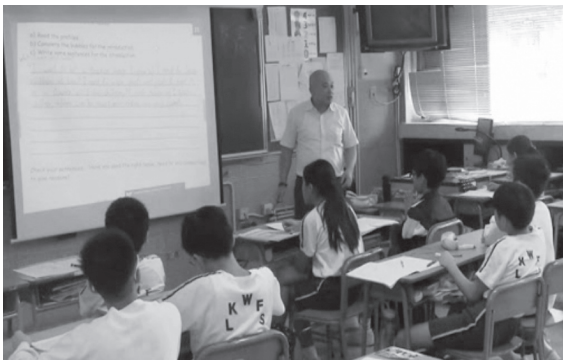
☐ a. helpful ☐ c. strong
☐ b. selfish ☐ d. scared

3. Who is the writer?

☐ a. the poor man ☐ c. Happy Prince
☐ b. a bird ☐ d. a kitten

4. Can you find any good words or expressions in the article? Underline them with a red pen.

	- Completing SVO tables • Why: Many students needed support in writing accurate sentences. • How: The basic "subject-verb-object" (SVO) structure was revisited in class. Then big SVO tables were put up in the classroom. Students took turns to write sentences following the basic SVO structure. • When: Students wrote sentences on the big SVO tables after class. To facilitate peer learning, the SVO tables were reviewed in class.	Spice up your writing! 🖒 You can use the following ways to make your writing more attractive. 1. as + adjective + as Example: 'as fierce as a tiger' 'The dog is as fierce as a tiger. You should not play with it.' Here are more examples: - as cunning as a fox - as strong as a bull - as wise as an owl Find out more by reading https://letterpile.com/writing/animal-similes 2. adj + but + adj Example: 'thin but strong' (-) (+) 'He is thin but strong. He is only 40 kg but he can carry a heavy bag.' 3. who.. Example: Mary is a nice girl who always helps her friends. (We use 'who always helps her friends' to add more details.) Here are more examples: - He is a naughty boy who breaks school rules. Use at least 2 of the tips above to describe your best friend. Examples: 1. My best friend is Mary. She is as gentle as a lamb. However, when she has problems, she always faces them. She is gentle but brave. 2. John is a friend who always comes first in examinations. He is as clever as an owl. Home study worksheets  Students filled in and read SVO tables during recess.
Monitoring learning progress	5. Adopting evaluation checklists for ongoing monitoring of learning progress • While- and post-writing stages - Drafting, self- and peer evaluation and redrafting • Why: Many students lacked self-monitoring skills. They did not have the habit of rereading their writing to make improvement. • How: With teachers' demonstration, students' writing underwent a feedback cycle: (1) self-evaluation of the first draft with a checklist; (2) peer	**Draft 1** **Writer's Checklist** Did you use the following grammar items in your writing? If yes, put a tick ☑ in the box. ☺ Present tense ☐ ☺ Past tense ☐ ☺ Future tense ☐ ☺ Adjectives ☐ **One thing I have done well**: _____ **One thing to improve in the next writing**: _____ C (content) _____/4 L (language) _____/4 O (organization) _____/2 (Marked by _____) Write your name here. C (content) _____/4 L (language) _____/4 O (organization) _____/2 (Marked by _____) Write your peer's name here.

	evaluation through reading, discussing and giving feedback on others' work; and (3) redrafting based on steps (1) and (2). To further improve their second drafts, the feedback cycle repeated but another checklist with different evaluation focuses was used. • When: Students underwent the feedback cycle for both fiction and non-fiction writing in KS2.	**Draft 2** **Writer's Checklist** Did you use the following grammar items in your writing? If yes, put a tick ☑ in the box. ☺ Adjectives with prepositions ☐ ☺ Adverbs ☐ ☺ Verb+ing (e.g. Falling over was an awful experience.) ☐ ☺ Others: _____ ☐ ☺ Others: _____ ☐ (Write your goals in P6) **One thing I have done well**: _____ **One thing to improve in the next writing**: _____ C (content) _____/4 L (language) _____/4 O (organization) _____/2 (Marked by _____) Write your name here. C (content) _____/4 L (language) _____/4 O (organization) _____/2 (Marked by _____) Write your peer's name here. Self- and peer evaluation checklists with different evaluation focuses
Evaluating learning outcomes	6. Evaluating students' performance • Post-writing stage - Why: Many students lacked skills in evaluating and conceptualising their own learning and transferring their writing experiences to new writing contexts. - How: • To help students identify areas for improvement, teachers gave feedback on the final draft. They also invited the writers and their peers to reflect and give feedback to facilitate peer learning. • The contexts of the pre-/post-tests were different from those of the unit writing tasks. By comparing students' output, teachers were able to observe whether students could apply the writing skills in new writing contexts. Transferability of such learning may be further verified through their performance in examinations.	  Teachers encouraged students to identify areas for improvement.

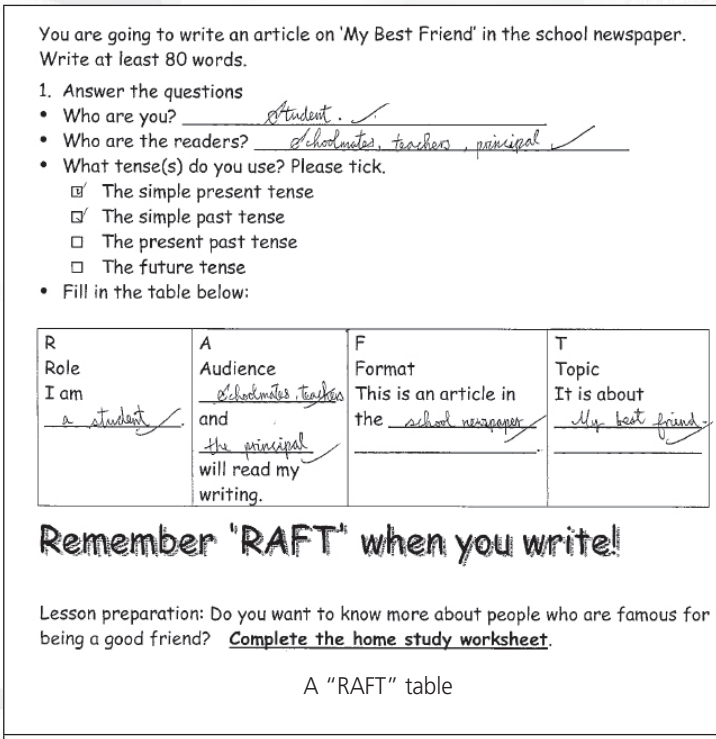
Impact

1. Student level

Students **improved their writing abilities**. As reflected from the post-test and writing examinations, there was improvement in the domains of content, language and organisation. In general, students could recycle the adjectives and sentence patterns learned and could paragraph their ideas sensibly. The less able students were more willing to write more and could write simple but accurate sentences. The more able ones wrote far more than required, demonstrating more elaboration and more complex sentence structures.

On the whole, students **developed better learning habits** and were able to **apply strategies** they had learned. Students used the "RAFT" strategy for analysing other writing topics and adopted picture analysis strategies for describing new pictures they came across. They also took the initiative to fill in the SVO tables after lessons. With the basic SVO structure as a foundation, the more able ones moved on to expand their sentences with the language and vocabulary items they had learned so as to write more complex sentences in the SVO tables and in their writing practices.

Samples of student work:



You are going to write an article on 'My Best Friend' in the school newspaper.
Write at least 80 words.

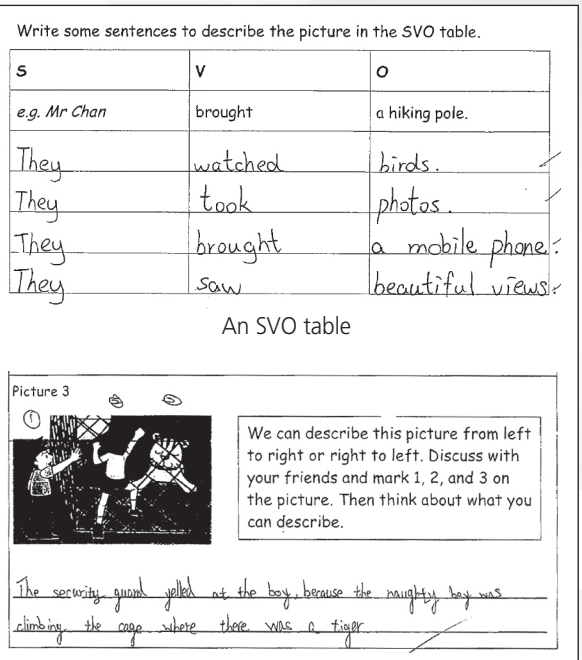
1. Answer the questions
- Who are you? student.
- Who are the readers? schoolmates, teachers, principal
- What tense(s) do you use? Please tick.
  - ☑ The simple present tense
  - ☑ The simple past tense
  - ☐ The present past tense
  - ☐ The future tense
- Fill in the table below:

R Role I am	A Audience	F Format	T Topic
a student.	schoolmates, teachers and the principal will read my writing.	This is an article in the school newspaper.	It is about My best friend.

Remember 'RAFT' when you write!

Lesson preparation: Do you want to know more about people who are famous for being a good friend? **Complete the home study worksheet**.

A "RAFT" table



Write some sentences to describe the picture in the SVO table.

S	V	O
e.g. Mr Chan	brought	a hiking pole.
They	watched	birds.
They	took	photos.
They	brought	a mobile phone.
They	saw	beautiful views.

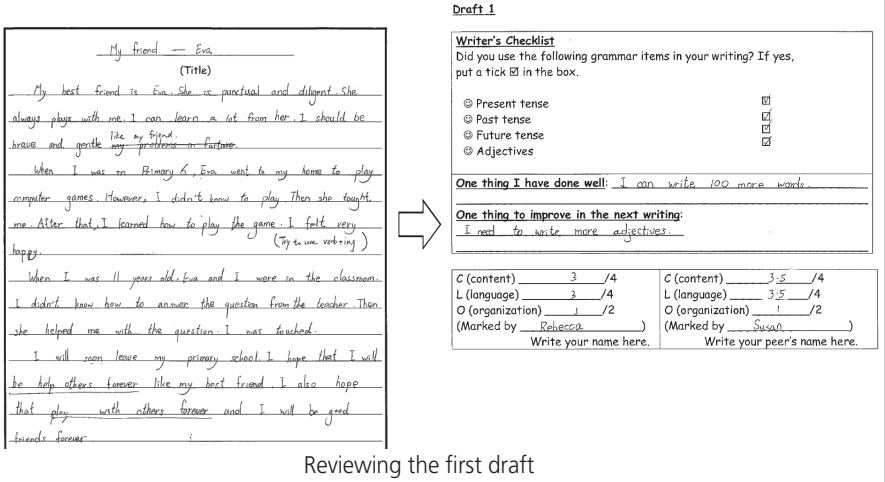
An SVO table

Picture 3

We can describe this picture from left to right or right to left. Discuss with your friends and mark 1, 2, and 3 on the picture. Then think about what you can describe.

The security guard yelled at the boy, because the naughty boy was climbing the cage where there was a tiger.

Using the strategy of picture analysis to describe a new picture



My friend — Eva

(Title)

My best friend is Eva. She is punctual and diligent. She always plays with me. I can learn a lot from her. I should be brave and gentle like my friend. my problems in future.

When I was in Primary 6, Eva went to my home to play computer games. However, I didn't know to play. Then she taught me. After that, I learned how to play the game. I felt very happy. (Try to use verbing)

When I was 11 years old, Eva and I were in the classroom. I didn't know how to answer the question from the teacher. Then she helped me with the question. I was touched.

I will soon leave my primary school. I hope that I will be help others forever like my best friend. I also hope that play with others forever and I will be good friends forever.

Draft 1

Writer's Checklist
Did you use the following grammar items in your writing? If yes, put a tick ☑ in the box.

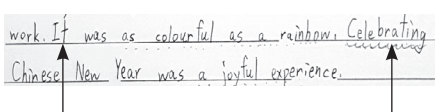
☺ Present tense	☑
☺ Past tense	☑
☺ Future tense	☑
☺ Adjectives	☑

One thing I have done well: I can write 100 more words.

One thing to improve in the next writing:
I need to write more adjectives.

C (content) 3 /4	C (content) 3.5 /4
L (language) 3 /4	L (language) 3.5 /4
O (organization) 1 /2	O (organization) 1 /2
(Marked by Rebecca)	(Marked by Susan)
Write your name here.	Write your peer's name here.

Reviewing the first draft and making plans for improvement



work. It was as colourful as a rainbow. Celebrating Chinese New Year was a joyful experience.

Applying the language learned in the home study worksheets

Applying the target language of the unit

Using the target language of the unit (gerund) and an additional language pattern (simile) learned in the home study worksheet in the writing post-test

2. **Teacher level**

   Teachers were empowered to **plan the school-based writing curriculum strategically** with self-directed learning elements infused. They aligned the design of the goal setting checklist with students' actual learning needs. Based on the pre-test analysis, suggested goals and coping strategies were provided in the checklist for students' selection. Teachers also aligned the design of the writing units with some of the suggested goals and strategies in the checklist. By infusing those strategies into unit planning, teachers gave students some ideas about what they should do for self-directed learning. This facilitated students to work independently towards the goals they had set for themselves.

3. **Curriculum level**

   With the incorporation of self-directed learning, **the curriculum has become more balanced**. Alongside the development of grammar and vocabulary knowledge and language skills, emphasis was also put on enhancing students' ability to diagnose needs, make plans, monitor progress as well as assess and reflect on their learning. This paved the way for cultivating students' learning to learn capabilities.

Facilitating factors

1. **Scaffolding and self-directed learning should go hand in hand**

   "How much help is too much?" is a paradox to many English teachers. To help students succeed in writing, improving skills in transferring knowledge is no less important than offering support in language and vocabulary. Like the teachers of this school, other teachers may strike a balance between scaffolding and self-directed learning tasks. At the pre-writing stage, pre-tasks can be provided to help students revisit the target language structures and vocabulary items. Likewise, they may improve their students' capabilities in skills transferability through learning to use strategies such as "RAFT". In this way, students can improve their context-specific knowledge and at the same time master skills to help them write in other contexts.

2. **Providing a conducive environment for self-directed learning**

   To many primary students, developing self-directed learning capabilities takes time and effort. They need teachers' support, peer help, clear goals and effective learning strategies and resources. The presence of these facilitating factors provides a conducive environment to gradually nurture students into independent writers.

Way forward

Building on the experience, teachers will improve and sustain what they have been doing in KS2. The next task is to revamp the junior-level writing curriculum. As they plan the writing units, they will strive for a balance between scaffolding and self-directed learning so as to lay a sound foundation for nurturing independent writers.

References

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Florence YIP (Language Support Officer)

Independent learning portfolio – A companion for building students' confidence in English learning

Background

Learning English for less proficient English learners and teaching difficult students to learn English can both be a discouraging experience. English teachers at Kowloon Sam Yuk Secondary School have adopted a multitude of methods, including trimming down the learning content, running extra lessons, giving additional practice and conducting more English activities, to motivate the relatively weaker learners and narrow their learning gap. Despite progress was observed among some students, teachers were concerned about how to develop the motivation of all students in improving their English learning with an ultimate goal of turning them into self-directed learners. Recognising that self-directed learning (SDL) can be challenging even for the brightest and most motivated students, teachers set getting their students ready for SDL as a modest goal. Literature informs that there are numerous signs of readiness for SDL. As a start, they would like their students to become organised, able to communicate effectively, and able to accept constructive feedback and engage in self-evaluation and self-reflection. To help students develop these skills progressively, teachers designed an independent learning portfolio (ILP) for each unit based on the re-organised school-based English Language curriculum.

Levels

S1-3

Strategies used

1. **Making learning goals clear, systematic and manageable for students**

   Westerberg (2009) quoted Stiggins (2008), learning goals best serve the information needs of all stakeholders, including students. When re-organising the English Language curriculum, teachers decided on the truly important learning for each unit, including but not limited to vocabulary, language skills, grammar items/structures and text type features. These items were set out in the unit plan and the ILP so that both teachers and students were well-informed about the learning expectations. The teaching of those items was sequenced in such a way that would prepare students for the output tasks, usually in the form of writing. Students were provided with a checklist containing those essential items which they could use to self-evaluate their writing.

2. **Using instructional scaffolding to help students achieve the learning goals**

   Instructional scaffolding is a process through which a teacher adds supports for students in order to help them achieve the learning goals. To build up students' confidence in tackling new and integrated tasks in particular, the teachers put emphasis on meeting both the affective and cognitive needs of students. Authentic and interesting tasks which require both individual efforts and peer interaction (e.g. designing a new school uniform together, giving advice on teenage problems) were set to engage students in meaningful learning. Useful theme-related resources such as songs and TV programmes available from websites and templates in the form of mind maps and tables were provided to help students generate rich ideas and organise them systematically for the output tasks.

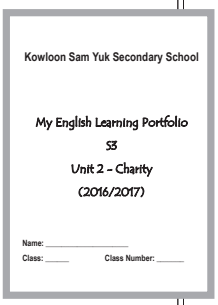
What happened

To increase students' readiness for SDL, the teacher team has developed five to six ILP packages and related learning and teaching materials at each junior secondary level. Each unit covers a balanced development of different language skills, knowledge and values and attitudes. An S3 unit on "Charity" is used as an example to illustrate how students are supported to become novice self-directed learners.

1. Planning with an end in mind

End-of-unit writing task *Your school is going to organise a fundraising activity for a charitable organisation. Your English teacher asked you to write an article for the school magazine to encourage schoolmates to join and support it.*	With this end in mind, teachers selected the essential content from the textbook, hence making students' learning more focused and manageable.

2. Making essential learning explicit to students



What we are going to learn in this unit:

Reading	Grammar and language functions	Writing
Text type 1. A web page 2. A poster Vocabulary 1. Charitable Organisations: - The Hong Kong Red Cross - World Vision - Doctors Without Borders - Oxfam - Helping Hand - Orbis 2. Their aims/services: 1. The Hong Kong Red Cross → protect human life 2. World Vision → improve poor children's lives 3. Doctors Without Borders → help sick people in poor countries 4. Oxfam → give clean water to poor families	1. The passive voice (Grammar 10-16) 2. Conditional sentences (Type 1) (Grammar 21) 5. Helping Hand → care for old people in Hong Kong 6. Orbis → help blind people in poor countries 3. Activities to raise money/fund: - 30-hour fast ( ) - charity concert ( ) - charity sale ( ) - sponsored run ( ) - flag day ( ) - charity fashion show ( )	Basic sentence patterns 1. S + will be + pp. + on + date + from + starting time+ to + finishing time - This event (S) will be held (pp.) on 1st October, 2016 (date) from 9:00 am (time) to 3:00 pm (time). 2. S + will be invited to gather + in + place - Our S1 to S3 students (S) will be invited to gather in the school hall (place). 3. The aim of + N + is to + V + O + for + N - The aim of the event (N) is to raise (V) money (O) for Food Angel (N). 4. S + aim(s) to + V + O - Food Angel (S) aims to provide (V) food (O) to poor people in Hong Kong. 5. S + will + V + O + because + it is + a/an + adj. + activity - I (S) will join (adj.) it (O) because it is a meaningful (adj.) activity. 6. If + S + V + O, S + will/can/should + V + O. - If you (S) want to support (V) us (O), you (S) should come to join (V) us (O).

The content page shows the core learning items that students need to display in the output tasks. Theme-related vocabulary items have been categorised so that students can learn ideas and concepts rather than just isolated words/ expressions. Grammar items and sentence patterns essential for the writing task have also been identified.

3. Providing opportunities for extended learning

Name of charitable organisations:	Target groups:	History / background:	Objectives:	Activities / programmes:	How can you help?
World Vision (_____)	poor children and their families	It is a global Christian organisation.	To _____ poor people's _____	- sponsor _____ - provide them food and _____	
Doctors Without Borders (_____)	sick people in poor countries	A group of _____ started it in 1971.	To help _____ _____ in poor countries	- provide a lot of _____ care services - heal _____	
Helping Hand (_____)	old people in Hong Kong	It is founded in 1978.	To care for _____ _____ in Hong Kong	- provide different _____ to the _____	
Orbis (_____)	blind people in poor countries	It is an international non-profit organisation.	To help _____ _____ in poor countries	- Flying Eye _____ - provide _____ care services	

Now, create a charity yourself! ^o^

Why do you want to create the charity on p.2?

_____

_____

Design **a poster** for your charity: (refer to TB p.27)

To make learning more motivating and challenging, students were asked to **create a new charity** and **design a poster** for it. This is an important step to developing autonomy among students.

4. Reinforcing learning through regular practice and teacher guidance

Today is _____ ( ). These are the things I learned.

Vocabulary	Words/Phrases	Parts of speech
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	5.	

Sentence patterns / Useful expressions

1. S + will be + pp. + on + date + from + starting time+ to + finishing time

Teacher's sentence: This event will be held on 1st October, 2016 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Classmates' sentences:

1. _____
2. _____

My sentence: _____

2. S + will be invited to gather + in + place

Teacher's sentence: Our S1 to S3 students will be invited to gather in the school hall.

Classmates' sentences:

1. _____
2. _____

My sentence: _____

3. The aim of + N + is to + V + O + for + N

Teacher's sentence: The aim of the event is to raise money for Food Angel.

Classmates' sentences:

1. _____
2. _____

My sentence: _____

More sentences ☺

Signature by teacher: _____

Students were assigned short home assignments which required them to make sentences by using the vocabulary and sentence patterns taught. They could learn from the examples given by their teacher and classmates. They were also encouraged to write more by making use of the space provided. Teachers reviewed students' work regularly and conducted conferencing with the target students who needed more support or advice.

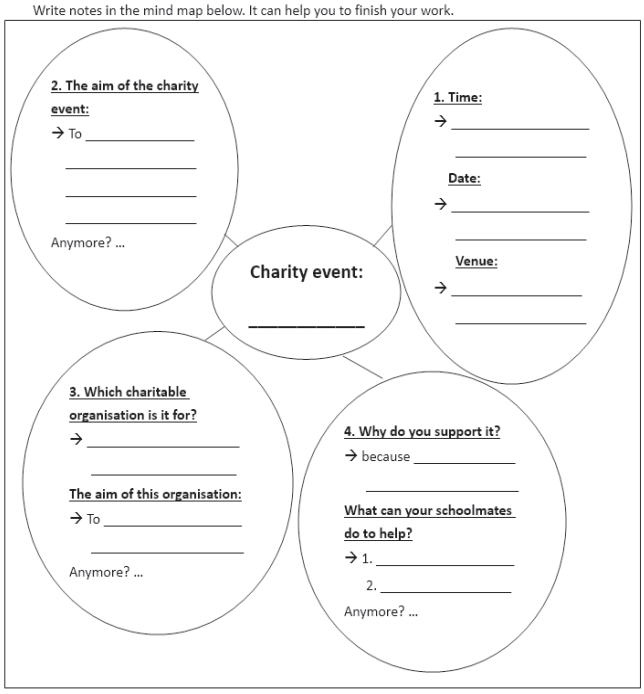
5. Engaging students in a deep learning process

Apart from drawing input from the reading texts, a TV programme titled "The Most Dangerous Ways to School" was shown to help students appreciate the difficulties faced by students in other impoverished places and get them to think how they could help so that those students could go to school safely. By appealing to their affection and involving them in problem solving, students' learning would be deepened.

6. Providing tools to help students generate and organise ideas systematically

C. Mind map

Write notes in the mind map below. It can help you to finish your work.



D. Structure

The following is the structure of your writing.

(Give a title to this article)

Paragraph 1: Our school is going to organize fund raising activity for a charity.
&
1. What is it? + 2. time + 3. date + 4. venue (30 words)

Paragraph 2: 1. The aim of the fund-raising event + 2. how to raise fund? (40 words)

Paragraph 3: 1. Which charitable organization is it for? + 2. The aim of this organization (40 words)

Paragraph 4: 1. Why do 'I' support the event? + 2. What do 'my' schoolmates do to help? (40 words)

Paragraph 5: I hope everybody can come and join us! See you all there!

Mind maps were used consistently in post-reading, writing and speaking tasks. With the hints given in the mind map and the writing framework, students displayed greater confidence in coming up with a piece of decent writing.

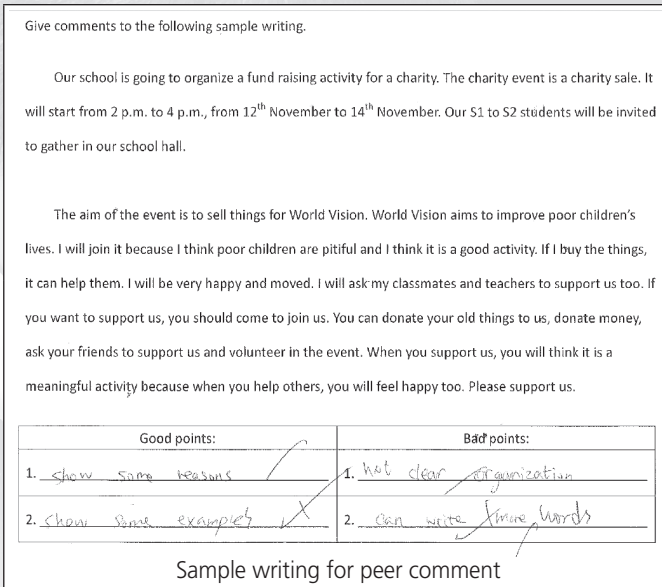
7. Providing students with a writing checklist for self-evaluation

S3 writing 2 (unit 2 - Charity)– Checklist

	Yes	No
1. I wrote at least **150 words** in this writing.		
2. I wrote **5 paragraphs**.		
3. I used **'S + will be + pp. + on + date + from + starting time + to + finishing time.'** in this writing.		
4. I used **'S + will be + invited to gather + in + place.'** in this writing.		
5. I used **'The aim of + N + is to + V + O + for + N.'** in this writing.		
6. I used **'S + aim(s) + to + V + O.'** in this writing.		
7. I used **'S + will + V + O + because + it is + a/an + adj. + activity.'** in this writing.		
8. I used **'If + you + V + O, S + will/can/should + V + O.'** in this writing.		

Students used this checklist as a reminder before they started to write and for self-evaluation before they submitted their writing. Effective use of the checklist could heighten students' awareness of the task requirements and enable them to seek self-improvement.

8. Helping students self-correct their work and learn from peers



Give comments to the following sample writing.

Our school is going to organize a fund raising activity for a charity. The charity event is a charity sale. It will start from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., from 12th November to 14th November. Our S1 to S2 students will be invited to gather in our school hall.

The aim of the event is to sell things for World Vision. World Vision aims to improve poor children's lives. I will join it because I think poor children are pitiful and I think it is a good activity. If I buy the things, it can help them. I will be very happy and moved. I will ask my classmates and teachers to support us too. If you want to support us, you should come to join us. You can donate your old things to us, donate money, ask your friends to support us and volunteer in the event. When you support us, you will think it is a meaningful activity because when you help others, you will feel happy too. Please support us.

Good points:	Bad points:
1. show some reasons ✓	1. not clear organization
2. show some examples ✓	2. can write more words

Sample writing for peer comment

n.	Noun	The girl is really a beautiful. X The girl is really a beauty. √
v.	Verb	The girl laughtered happily. X The girl laughed happily. √
adj.	Adjective	The hunger boy eats quickly. X The hungry boy eats quickly. √
adv.	Adverb	The men laughed loud. X The men laughed loudly. √
art.	Article	We have waited for a hour. X We have waited for an hour. √
no.	Number	I like this cars. X I like this car. √

Extract of marking code for composition

Through correcting their own mistakes with the help of the marking codes and identifying good sentences made by classmates, students' language proficiency was enhanced. Through commenting the strengths and weaknesses of a sample writing, students learned to give constructive feedback while exercising their critical thinking.

Impact

1. **Students showed increasing ownership for their learning.** Below are some teachers' observations:
   - Students brought along their ILP to class and made reference to it whenever they needed language support for completing the learning tasks. They also made use of it for revision to prepare for tests and examinations.
   - Many students, not necessarily the brightest ones, attempted to write more sentences than required.
   - Students showed more active participation in self-reflection and peer evaluation tasks by using the checklist and the marking codes provided. They have also developed the habit of editing their work before submission.
   - Even the less proficient students were willing to write. Some of them chose to supplement their writing with drawings and pictures.

2. **There was overall improvement in students' writing.** Teachers were encouraged to find that no students gave up in both coursework and examinations. More evident improvement was found in content and organisation. Students were able to provide relevant ideas and employ different elaboration methods such as giving details, examples, reasons, consequences and suggestions. Ideas were logically sequenced and grouped into paragraphs. Students from stronger groups in particular wrote far more than the word requirement. The following is an unedited piece of student writing showing how she benefited from the supports provided.

a	Our school is going to organize a fund raising activity for a charity. This charity event is flag day. This event will be held on 14th June 2016, Saturday from 9:00am to 1:00pm on the street in Mong kok. All S1 to S6 students are invited to join this event. The aim of this event is to raise money to Doctors Without Borders. We will go to the street to ask people to donate money. Then, we will donate all the money to Doctors Without Borders.	✓ The article is well-structured a. Details of the fundraising activity b. Details about the charitable organisation c. How students can help ✓ Ideas are well-elaborated ✓ Ends appropriately with an appeal for support ✓ Target structures (underlined) used are generally correct
b	Doctors Without Borders is a great charitable organization. It aims to help sick people in poor countries. If the people get epidmics, it can delivering emergency medical aid to people affected by conflict or bacteria. It can improve their lives.	
c	I support this charity event because it is a meaning activity. Also, I have watched a TV Programme in which Doctors Without Borders helped a lot of patients in poor countries. You can also put money into the flag bag and invite you relatives or friend to come to visit you and donate money. I hope everybody can come and join us! See you all there.	

3. **Teachers were empowered to make curriculum decisions that support the use of new learning modes.** Helping less proficient students learn English and become self-directed learners is a real challenge. This requires space and expertise. Teachers made significant reduction and re-organisation of the learning content found in the textbook based on professional considerations, hence making students' learning more focused and manageable. With the space created, they put more effort in improving the scaffolding process and developing tools and materials (e.g. ILP, writing checklist and marking codes) that support students to learn independently. To complement direct teaching, teachers conducted post-writing conferencing and promoted self- and peer evaluation to help students reflect on and improve their work. To extend classroom learning, interesting materials from websites were used to increase learning motivation while frequent but manageable amount of home assignments were given to help students develop a study habit. These different attempts reflected that teachers have gained a deeper understanding of the characteristics and needs of their students and were putting greater emphasis on the learning process.

Facilitating factors

1. The principal has played an indispensable role in the whole process of collaboration by offering professional and administrative support. She attended all the co-planning meetings and was well-acquainted with the purpose and the design of this project. Immediate green light was given when teachers proposed reducing the learning content to be covered. To relieve teachers' anxiety and workload, she tactfully merged the lesson observation arranged for this project with the annual appraisal observation.

2. It took three years to develop the ILP packages and the school-based English Language curriculum. The presence of a stable team with members' whole-hearted involvement at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages is crucial to the sustainable development of this project. They upheld individual and collective responsibility by taking turns to develop the curriculum plans and collaborating in improving the design. By conducting evidence-based discussion on students' performance in every unit, a high degree of consensus on what students need and what strategies work was achieved. Teachers were boosted by this professional and collaborative culture to strive for continuous improvement.

Way forward

Teachers can explore how to help their students become proficient self-directed learners. To empower students to take greater responsibility for their learning, topics such as needs diagnosis, goal setting and choosing appropriate learning strategies to achieve those goals can be included in the school-based English Language curriculum.

References

Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. *Self-directed learning: A four-step process.* Retrieved from: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/tips-students/self-directed-learning/self-directed-learning-four-step-process

Westerberg, T. (2009). *Becoming a great high school.* Retrieved from: http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109052/chapters/Strategy-1@-Developing-Clear-Instructional-Goals.aspx

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Infusing life planning education into an academic- and career-related English theme

Background

Faced with less motivated students without clear life goals to pursue, English teachers of Ho Ngai College (Sponsored by Sik Sik Yuen) tried integrating life planning education into the school curriculum. To inform the design of the pilot project, teachers had conducted an informal survey to identify students' knowledge about self, and options of study and work. In response to the needs identified, elements of life planning education were incorporated into unit planning to boost students' motivation to learn English, build their self-understanding, raise their awareness of possible study and career options, and ultimately develop their study and career aspirations.

Level

S3

Strategies used

<table>
<tr><th>Students' needs identified</th><th>Strategies used in the project design</th></tr>
<tr><td>Lacking
• self-understanding
• study and/or career aspirations
• knowledge about the options of learning and work</td><td>
1. Identifying themes and textbook units that provide an appropriate context for developing students' self-understanding and knowledge about career options
A module comprising two units of work on the theme "Finding My Dream Job" was designed with life planning elements infused into it. The first unit was adapted from the textbook unit "The Best Job in the World", whereas the second one "Understanding Myself" was extended from unit one and developed around a personality test. The table below outlines the major life planning education learning focuses/elements in the module design:
<table>
<tr><th>Life planning education components</th><th>Learning focuses/elements</th></tr>
<tr><td>Self-understanding and development</td><td>• Make a self-assessment of qualities, aptitudes and abilities
• Relate results of self-assessment to tentative academic and career goal setting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Career exploration</td><td>• Build knowledge on occupations
• Identify and use career information
• Be aware of the opportunities offered by various study choices or options</td></tr>
<tr><td>Career planning and management</td><td>• Understand the requirements of different occupations and how one's competencies and aspirations are related
• Set tentative personal life and learning plan towards career goals</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
</table>

- Possessing limited knowledge of the topic vocabulary
- Having difficulty in expressing one's interests, abilities, aspirations/goals and personal plans

2. Embedding English learning elements in life planning tasks/learning activities

When planning for the delivery of life planning education at school, English teachers involved have established two major principles. First, they would play a "supporting" role by teaching it as part of the academic subject through an infusion mode. Second, they would make use of the module to help students not only learn English but also about self, study and career. Apart from covering the related text types such as job advertisements, interview scripts and personal descriptions to help students learn about self, study and career in English, teachers identified relevant language emphases to address their students' specific needs in vocabulary learning and sentence construction.

Life planning education components and core tasks	English learning elements		
	Topic Vocabulary	Vocabulary skills	Example language items/ structures/ sentence patterns
Self-understanding and Development: To understand oneself	• Interests	• Collocation	• "enjoy"+ Gerund
	• Skills/Abilities	• Collocation	• "good at" + Gerund • "can" + Bare-infinitive • "able" + To-infinitive
	• Personality	/	• Subject + Verb-to-be + Adjective
Career Exploration: To investigate different options of study and work	• Job names	• Suffixation	/
	• Job duties/ responsibilities	• Word association: People-Action-Thing	•Subject + Verb+ Object
	• Job requirements	/	• "It is important/ You need" + To-infinitive
Career Planning and Management: To make decisions on occupational preference/goal and formulate tentative plans	• Job names	/	• Modal Verb + Gerund e.g. "*I will consider becoming a/an (job) in future.*"
	• Senior secondary elective subjects	/	• Modal Verb + Gerund e.g. "*I will start taking (subject) at school.*"

- Lacking learning motivation

3. Incorporating motivational strategies into the curriculum design

Several motivational teaching practices shared by Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) were tried out:

a) Making the curriculum relevant to let students see the value of learning

Conducting a needs analysis to find out students' interests/goals and then building these personal elements in the curriculum

To motivate students to read and plan for the future, teachers tailor-made an information sheet linking those dream jobs which students had indicated in the pre-project survey with the study opportunities available.

Using resources related to the background of students

To make learning more practical for students now, teachers strategically directed them to the school webpage in the module, heightening their awareness of the senior secondary elective subjects offered at school and the connection between subjects and career choices. To enable students to see the future practical value of the learning content in real-life situations, teachers also intentionally selected online study and career resources specific for the youths in Hong Kong so that they could gain access to the materials any time after the module.

Subjects Offered | Ho N

https://www.hongai.edu.hk/administration/subject_offered?language=en

嗇色園主辦可藝中學
Ho Ngai College (Sponsored by Sik Sik Yuen)

A A A 繁體 | English

Main menu

Subjects Offered

School courses Network courses

Subject offered (2017-2018)

Subject	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
English Language	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chinese Language	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chinese Literature	-	-	-	-	-	◒
Putonghua	●	●	●	-	-	-
Mathematics	●	●	●	●	●	●
Liberal Studies	-	-	-	●	●	●
Integrated Humanities	●	●	●	-	-	-
Chinese History	●	●	●	-	◒	-
Science	●	●	●	-	-	-
Physics	-	-	-	●	●	●

b) Increasing the attractiveness of the learning content/tasks to break student lethargy

Including novel content areas to spark interest

To stimulate students' career aspirations, not only did the module include options of more common reality-based jobs, it also gave them exposure to some unusual cool jobs that students would fancy.

Enlisting students as active participants by involving physical and mental movements

Instead of using a pen-and-paper mode, teachers conducted an informal personality test through a movement activity. In the activity, students moved around the classroom and selected two personality descriptions that best match their interest profiles. In addition to engaging students physically, teachers involved students cognitively by assigning them a problem solving task. Working with classmates of similar personality types rather than the former groups, students had to analyse the nature of the jobs suggested for different personalities in this collaborative task.

Students showing engagement in the sharing and analytical tasks

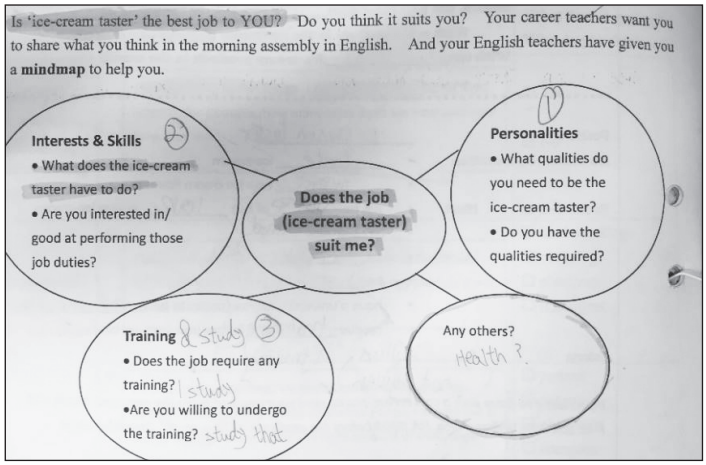
c) Increasing learner autonomy to let students take charge of their own learning experience

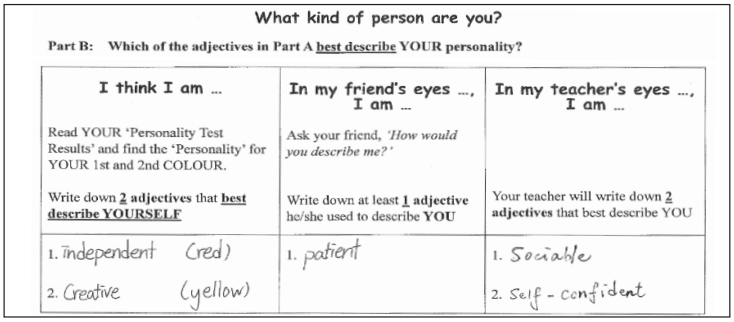
Allowing students choices about whether to and what resources to use to complete the extended tasks

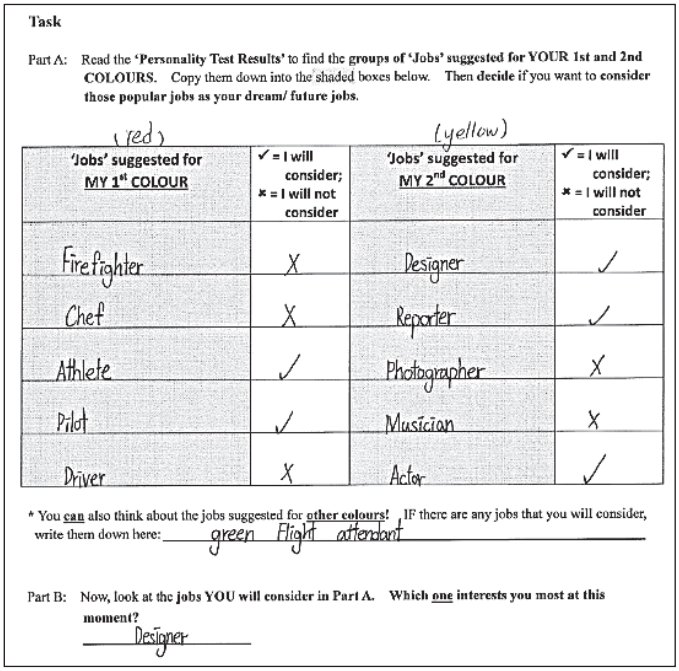
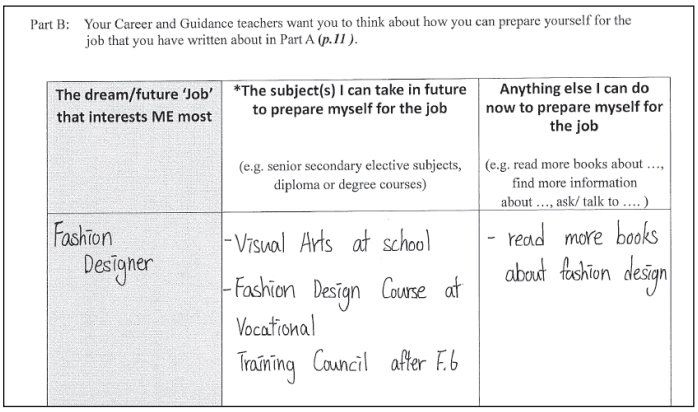
To encourage students to be more self-directed, teachers adopted two practices in this module. First, students were given optional learning resources for further reading or viewing outside the classroom. Those resources were mainly online materials with QR codes embedded to make learning more accessible, efficient, and interactive for less engaged students. Second, to empower students to overcome possible learning barriers in doing independent reading, they were taught how to use some text to speech e-learning tools such as NaturalReader.

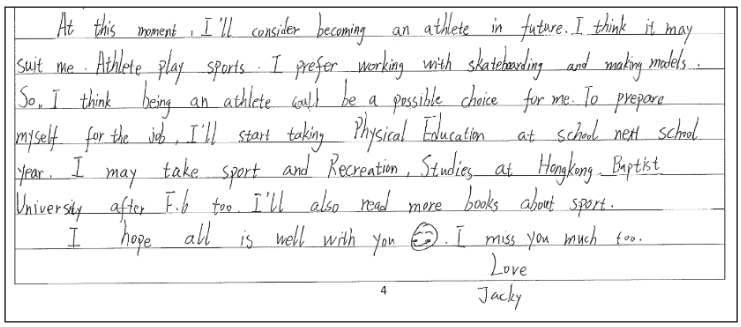
What happened

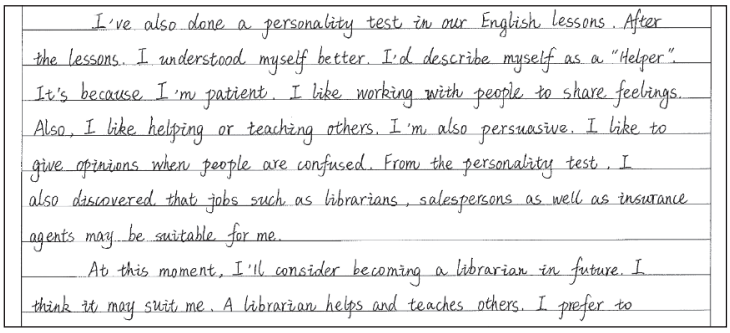
The following shows some examples of the tasks/activities in the module "Finding My Dream Job":

Tasks	Teaching and learning objectives	Materials/Students' work
• Read the job description of an ice-cream taster • Give an oral presentation on the suitability of the job	• Build knowledge of work • Identify the text type features of interview scripts • Understand how job requirements and one's interests, orientations or abilities can be related	 Students were guided to reflect on their suitability for being an ice-cream taster based on their interests, personality, and the training required.

Tasks	Teaching and learning objectives	Materials/Students' work
• Do an informal personality test	• Explore one's personality types, strengths and preferences • Develop insights into the study and career options that may match one's personality • Learn about personality adjectives	 Students were provided with descriptive feedback from peers and teachers to promote self-esteem and build self-concept.

• Identify jobs of interest	• Broaden one's scope of career possibilities • Make tentative career decisions in accordance with one's interests and orientations	 **Task** Part A: Read the **'Personality Test Results'** to find the **groups of 'Jobs' suggested for YOUR 1st and 2nd COLOURS.** Copy them down into the shaded boxes below. Then **decide** if you want to **consider those popular jobs as your dream/ future jobs.** (red) (yellow) 'Jobs' suggested for MY 1st COLOUR / ✓ = I will consider; ✗ = I will not consider / 'Jobs' suggested for MY 2nd COLOUR / ✓ = I will consider; ✗ = I will not consider Firefighter X Designer ✓ Chef X Reporter ✓ Athlete ✓ Photographer X Pilot ✓ Musician X Driver X Actor ✓ * You **can** also think about the jobs suggested for **other colours!** IF there are any jobs that you will consider, write them down here: green Flight attendant Part B: Now, look at the **jobs YOU will consider in Part A. Which one interests you most at this moment?** Designer Students were stimulated to make more conscious career choices in the self-exploration task using the personality test results as a starting point.
• Plan for one's dream job/career aspirations	• Acquire the study and career information • Develop an awareness of the possible linkage of study opportunities with career choices and career pathways • Develop ideas for pursuing their career aspirations/dreams by asking them to devise a tentative plan to achieve career goals	 Part B: Your Career and Guidance teachers want you to think about how you can prepare yourself for the job that you have written about in Part A *(p.11)*. The dream/future 'Job' that interests ME most / *The subject(s) I can take in future to prepare myself for the job (e.g. senior secondary elective subjects, diploma or degree courses) / Anything else I can do now to prepare myself for the job (e.g. read more books about …, find more information about …, ask/ talk to ….) Fashion Designer / -Visual Arts at school -Fashion Design Course at Vocational Training Council after F.6 / - read more books about fashion design Students were encouraged to connect their tentative career aspirations with individual learning plans through the goal setting task.

Tasks	Teaching and learning objectives	Materials/Students' work
• Read and write a personal email about one's self-understanding and study/ career aspirations	• Present students' learning gained about self, study and career options • Develop a sense of direction through writing a personal description and plan	 At this moment, I'll consider becoming an athlete in future. I think it may suit me. Athlete play sports. I prefer working with skateboarding and making models. So, I think being an athlete will be a possible choice for me. To prepare myself for the job, I'll start taking Physical Education at school next school year. I may take sport and Recreation, Studies at Hongkong Baptist University after F.6 too. I'll also read more books about sport. I hope all is well with you ☺. I miss you much too. Love Jacky 4 (An excerpt from the final writing task) A less able student was able to express his career aspirations and personal plan with the target language.

	• Identify main ideas and use the target writing skills e.g. RAFT (**R**ole, **A**udience, **F**ormat, **T**opic), planning a writing outline, text type features of informal emails	 (An excerpt from the final writing task) A more able student was able to describe her personality with details using the language taught.

I've also done a personality test in our English lessons. After the lessons, I understood myself better. I'd describe myself as a "Helper". It's because I'm patient. I like working with people to share feelings. Also, I like helping or teaching others. I'm also persuasive. I like to give opinions when people are confused. From the personality test, I also discovered that jobs such as librarians, salespersons as well as insurance agents may be suitable for me.

At this moment, I'll consider becoming a librarian in future. I think it may suit me. A librarian helps and teaches others. I prefer to

Impact

Students

Students generally showed improved engagement in this module. One student interviewee even said he had not snoozed in class because of the practicality and relevancy of the tasks. Besides engagement, the data collected from interviews, student work and questionnaires show that students have experienced personal growth in the thematic module, which can be summarised and integrated as follows:

Built an understanding of self	• Interviewees expressed that their self-understanding and awareness of own interests, abilities and personality had been enhanced. They said the personality test was the most insightful.
Learned about study and career options	• About two-thirds of students revealed in the questionnaire that the module had increased their knowledge of different career and subject choices.
Identified career dreams/ possibilities and were more aware of the career decision-making process	• Students generally realised that interests and personality types could be the basis for their career choices. Some added in the interview that abilities that match the job requirements would also be an important consideration.
Devised tentative plans towards the career aspirations	• One interviewee said, "The newly learned knowledge of career pathways has enabled me to make more informed senior secondary elective subject choices."

Teachers

Teachers recognised the value of giving their students opportunities to explore life planning events such as developing career goals and making subject choices in the English classroom. In their views, such a connection could maximise the meaning of the learning experience to students and at the same time, help inspire students to take a deeper interest in their future or lives. Upon reflection, teachers also found the mapping of the English learning elements and life planning education components, coupled with the use of motivational and scaffolding strategies, effective for planning and implementing the module. They felt particularly encouraged by students' improvements in writing, from their motivation to the actual writing performance.

Facilitating factors

It has been the school's staffing practice to appoint English teachers to teach the same group of junior secondary students for three years in a row. Taking advantage of this strategic staff deployment, teachers learned much about their students and were therefore able to build that understanding into the design of the pilot project. Teachers' foresightedness is definitely another positive factor contributing to this project. Aware of the fact that the school Guidance and Career Team would be administering a formal RIASEC (**R**ealistic, **I**nvestigative, **A**rtistic, **S**ocial, **E**nterprising and **C**onventional) personality test with the S6 students in Chinese, the project teachers decided to conduct a similar but much less formal personality test with the S3 students in English. Not only did this arrangement successfully widen students' English exposure, it also fostered their personal growth by stimulating them to reflect upon their own personality alongside occupational preferences at different key stages. After all, one's understanding of self and occupational preferences evolves over time (Super, 1996).

Way forward

The timing of this project will be adjusted to align with the school's senior secondary elective subject selection exercise for S3 students. This co-ordination will further help students make informed subject choices that suit their personality, interests, abilities, strengths or career aspirations.

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