



**Realising the potential of students with
diverse characteristics and learning needs**

3.4 Catering for the learning needs of local and cross-border students: A case of P4

Background

Fuk Tak Education Society Primary School admits a significant proportion of cross-border students across year levels, implying that students' English proficiency ranges from developing basic competency of the newly arrived students to attaining proficiency beyond KS1 level. To help upper primary students with different starting points learn English more effectively and adapt to the learning environment in Hong Kong, teachers designed the school English Language curriculum starting from P4, incorporating the use of various strategies such as self-directed learning, life-wide learning and e-learning to develop a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and values and attitudes with a view to enhancing students' understanding of themselves, people around them, community and society.

Level

P4

Strategies used

1. Adopting a framework of development for systematic planning of lateral curriculum coherence

To enhance students' understanding of and sense of connection to different levels of context, namely "Individual and peer development" (focusing on themselves and people around them), "Class and school understanding" (focusing on life within school) and "Community and social adaptation" (focusing on life beyond school), P4 textbook units were mapped into one of the three levels as shown in Figure 1 to set clear unit objectives alongside the development of language skills.

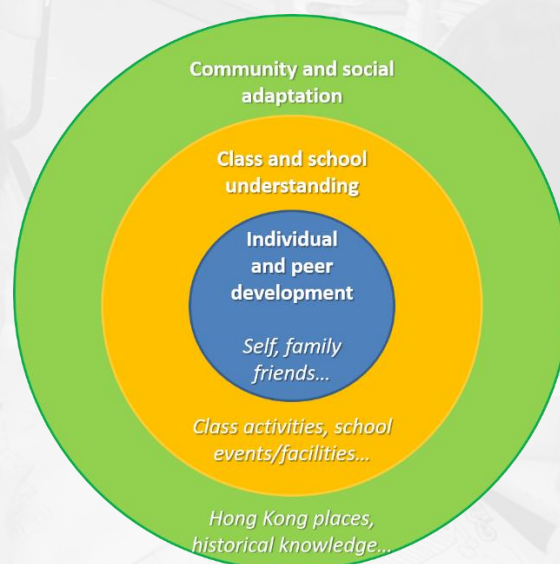


Figure 1 Levels of contexts to enhance students' personal development

2. Infusing e-learning and life-wide learning elements into relevant units to enrich students' language exposure and learning experience

To broaden students' horizons in terms of language exposure and to provide them with authentic contexts for meaningful application of their learning, teachers adopted e-tools accessible on the Mainland and incorporated life-wide learning activities that extended students' learning space. In this light, students' learning time within and outside the school was utilised.

What happened

Learning time within school: Conducting holistic planning through mapping textbook units into the framework of levels of contexts

The P4 English Language curriculum

To provide teachers and students with a clear direction for development, textbook units were mapped into one of the three levels of contexts (see Figure 1), and key tasks and activities were designed for students' to gain thematic knowledge and apply their learning in real-life situations. With this framework, units were reorganised under different levels of context and were reordered so as to help students progressively develop their understanding of the world. Furthermore, they were given more opportunities to showcase their acquisition of various language and generic skills in a wide range of authentic tasks including interactive tasks such as interviews and presentations (see Table 1 for a summary of the P4 English Language curriculum). As can be seen from Table 1, learning tasks became progressively more complex as the units moved from the inner to the outer levels of contexts (e.g. from giving a presentation to classmates on "My best friend" in Term 1 to introducing their work on the Open Day to visitors and to interacting with tourists in English in Term 2). As a result, students underwent deeper learning through higher-order, critical thinking that facilitated the active construction of knowledge and skills (Fisher & Heikkinen, 2010).

Levels of contexts	Modules	Units	Key tasks/activities (Text types in bold)	Language points
Individual and peer development	Connecting with Other People (Term 1)	- Knowing Me, Knowing You - Same or Different	- Conducting interviews with peers for personal information - Writing an introduction to a best friend - Giving a presentation about best friend	<u>Vocabulary:</u> Hobbies and interests, describing personalities and habits <u>Target structure:</u> Adverbs of frequency
Class and school understanding	Making Improvement (Term 1)	- Be a Star Pupil - Having Good Habits	- Creating a new school club	<u>Vocabulary:</u> Hobbies and interests <u>Target structures:</u>

Levels of contexts	Modules	Units	Key tasks/activities (Text types in bold)	Language points
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing a proposal for a new school club - Giving a presentation about a new club 	Dos and don'ts, rules and obligations
	Food and Drinks (Term 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy Eating - A Balanced Diet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making a poster of a snack - Giving a presentation about a healthy snack - Designing a booth on the English Day to sell healthy snacks 	<u>Vocabulary:</u> Food and drinks, food pyramid, nutrition labels <u>Target structure:</u> Making comparison using comparatives and superlatives
Community and social adaptation	Now and Then (Term 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Old Hong Kong - When I was Little 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading online sources extensively about history of Hong Kong and China, comparing life 500 years ago, 50 years ago and now - Making posters on various aspects of life in different eras for display on the school Open Day - Presenting their posters to guests on the Open Day 	<u>Vocabulary:</u> Modern and ancient life events, daily routines <u>Target structures:</u> The past tense, comparatives/ superlatives
	We Love Hong Kong (Term 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having Fun in Hong Kong - Finding Your Way around 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing leaflets about Hong Kong places to be given to interviewed tourists as souvenir - Conducting interviews with tourists in Stanley 	<u>Vocabulary:</u> Hong Kong places, itinerary, locations <u>Target structures:</u> Formulating questions, giving suggestions using <i>You can...</i>

Table 1 A summary of the P4 English Language curriculum

Learning time outside school: Incorporating e-learning and life-wide learning activities into relevant units

To extend students' learning space and time, teachers designed tasks that allowed students to make good use of their learning time outside English lessons in school and beyond school time (e.g. at home and in the community). The following paragraphs illustrate with examples how students' learning time at home, outside lessons in school and in the community was exploited, thereby (i) expanding the sources of the knowledge learnt, and (ii) allowing them to apply the knowledge, skills and values and attitudes learnt in real-life situations.

At home

As cross-border students' time at school was much reduced by the longer commute time, teachers incorporated resources available online on the Mainland for students' easy access, and uploaded adapted learning resources onto learning platforms for students to perform tasks at home across the border. For example, in the module "Now and Then", teachers adapted multiple sources of information from the Internet regarding different aspects of life 500 years ago, 50 years ago and now in Hong Kong and Mainland China, which were consolidated into customised texts uploaded onto electronic platforms accessible by students both in Hong Kong and at home such as *WeChat* public account and *SlideShare* (see Figure 2 for examples). This way, students may gain full access to learning materials without being limited by location and time.

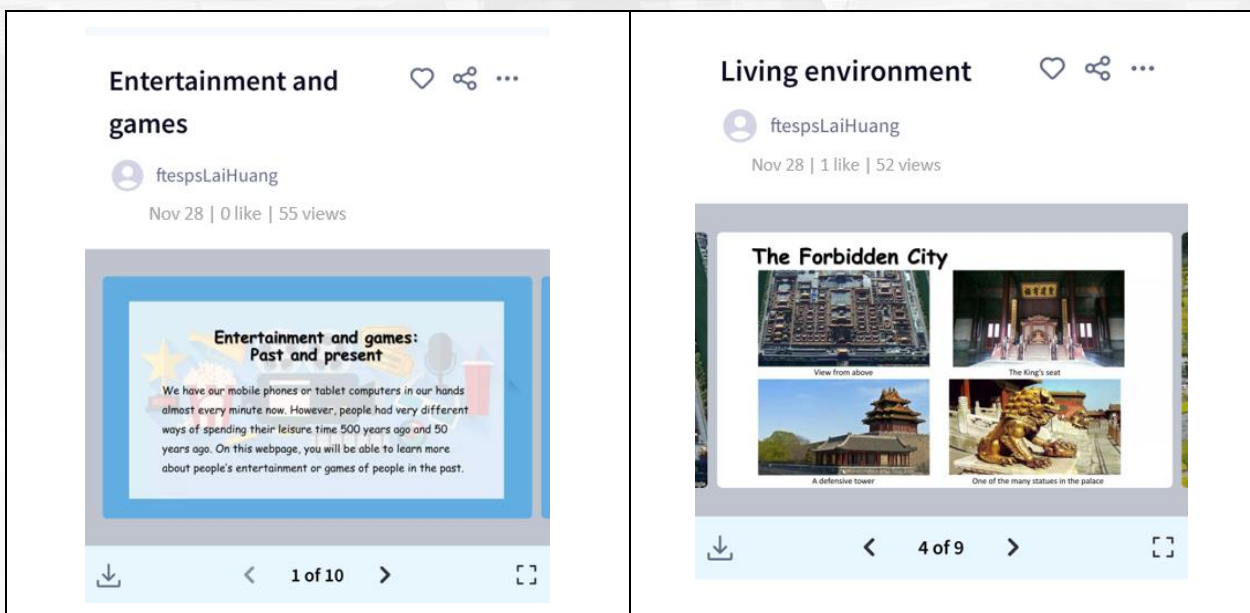


Figure 2 Screenshots of adapted texts uploaded onto *SlideShare*

Outside lesson time in school

Co-curricular activities were incorporated into the relevant units to provide a real-life context for students to demonstrate their learning from English lessons. For example, as extension of their learning in the module "Food and Drinks" learning about the food pyramid and food labels, P4 students set up booths to introduce healthy snacks from different countries of their own choice on the International Snacks Day. The activity provided students with opportunities to learn and practise presenting information about snacks, including names and nutritional information.



Figure 3 Students engaged in speaking activities about healthy snacks.



Figure 4 Student motivation was enhanced through a reward system that led to prizes.



Figure 5 Students were given the opportunity to taste the snacks introduced.

For the module “Now and Then”, students presented their posters in different aspects of life in different eras, including schooling, transport, housing, currency, clothing and entertainment, to visitors of the school’s 60th Anniversary Open Day. They were able to use suitable speaking and presentation skills to introduce their learning precisely and concisely to teachers, parents, peers and other members of the school community.

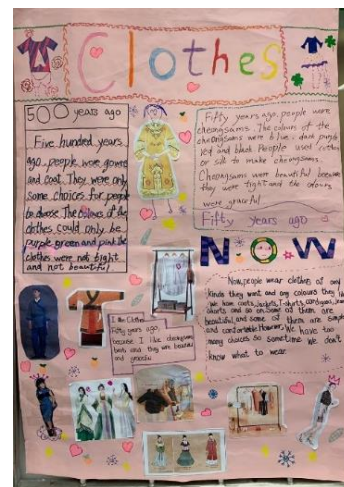
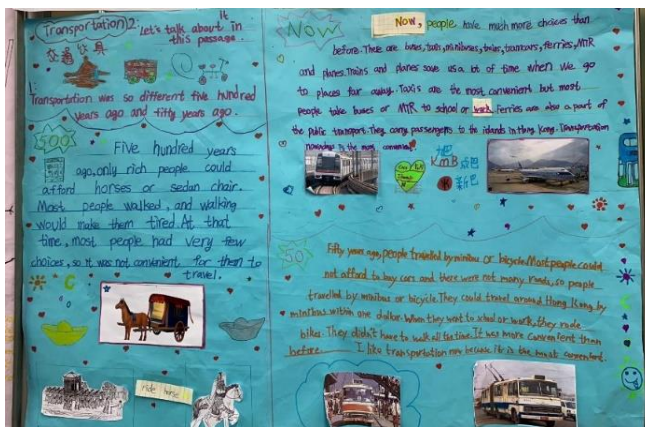


Figure 6 Examples of posters comparing life 500 years ago, 50 years ago and now

In the community

Apart from learning about the various themes in English lessons, students were also given ample opportunities to apply their learning of knowledge, skills and values and attitudes in authentic contexts through relevant post-module life-wide learning activities for units grouped under “Community and social adaptation”, aiming at helping students “achieve the aims of whole-person development and enable them to develop the lifelong learning capabilities that are needed in our ever-changing society” (Education Bureau, 2023).

For example, in the module “We Love Hong Kong”, students interviewed tourists in Stanley to collect their views about Hong Kong and their experiences such as favourite tourist spots and dining experiences. To bestow a meaningful purpose of the module project, each interviewee was given as a souvenir a copy of a leaflet of Hong Kong tourist attractions or districts (including Sai Kung, Wan Chai, Ocean Park, Mongkok, Disneyland and Tsim Sha Tsui) the particular tourist had not visited. Since the tourists were of a wide range of nationalities and not necessarily native speakers of English, students used English as a lingua franca.



Figure 7 Students interviewing tourists of different nationalities in English: British (left) and Korean (right)



Figure 8 A leaflet about a tourist attraction the tourist has not visited was given as a souvenir.

At the end of the day, teachers also gave students a brief tour around Stanley to familiarise them with the area. This helped students, especially those residing on the Mainland, gain a better understanding of places in Hong Kong they would seldom visit.

Impact

Curriculum level

The P4 English Language curriculum was revamped to facilitate students', particularly those who travel across the border daily from the Mainland, understanding and adaptation to the new learning environment and people around them. Categorising textbook modules and units under the three levels of contexts (see Figure 1) and reordering the units along the framework provided a clear direction for students' learning and development from their own proximity to the community and society. Their knowledge, skills and values and attitudes were progressively developed throughout the school year. Through incorporating learning and teaching materials accessible on the Mainland as well as organising co-curricular activities outside lesson time within school and life-wide learning activities in the community, students were given opportunities to apply their learning in authentic situations and communicate with members of the society, thereby making good use of learning time (as suggested in Curriculum Development Council, 2022). A broader and more balanced curriculum was designed to deepen students' learning experiences and foster whole-person development.

Teacher level

Teachers formed a more holistic perspective of the school English Language curriculum through exploring possibilities to cater for the learning needs of both local and cross-border students. Their professional capacity was enhanced through organically incorporating learning and teaching tasks and activities both within and outside of English lessons and the school, aligning the different stages of learning with focused objectives and a road map of knowledge and skills development. Their repertoire of pedagogical strategies was also expanded as more interactive learning tasks and tools were designed, and they were able to provide timely and appropriate feedback for students based on observations on student performance so as to give them a sense of direction for learning and further improvement. In the course of curriculum development, they have also manifested curriculum leadership capabilities such as using data effectively, and making good use of school and community resources with a view to extending students' learning experiences. More importantly, the collaborating teachers conducted a sharing session with all members of the English department so as to build a sharing and collaborative culture among team members, demonstrating the achievements attained during the year. The development of the teaching team may facilitate and sustain the growth of the English panel.

Student level

From teachers' observation, students' learning motivation increased as the modules and units were designed around their daily lives. In general, students manifested improvement in all four language skills in terms of lesson engagement and assessment. They were also able to produce a wide range of learning outcomes such as designing posters with clear articulation of necessary information (see Figure 6 above) and making leaflets attractive to visitors (see Figure 8 above and Figure 9 below), and giving informative presentations without having to refer to notes (see Figure 10 below) with clear concepts of the purposes and potential audience in mind. Furthermore, given the lack of opportunities of language use and their late start in learning English, the cross-border students showed significant improvement especially in speaking and listening as the learning tasks were developed for them to make authentic use of the target language in different situations (e.g. using

English as a lingua franca when interviewing tourists).

Presenting an itinerary	<p style="text-align: center; color: green;"><u>My Favourite Place in Hong Kong</u></p> <p>My favourite place in Hong Kong is Mong Kok. I really want to recommend this place to you because you can do a lot of things there. You can go there by MTR.</p> <p>First, you can go shopping and watch a movie in Langham Place. Then, you can buy some Computer games or other computer things at Mong Kok Computer Centre. Then, you can eat delicious street snacks, such as Curry fish balls, sticky tofu and so on. Finally, you can go to the Sneaker Street. There are many fashionable sports shoes you can buy.</p> <p>I think Mong Kok is the most wonderful place in Hong Kong. I like it very much.</p>	<p>Using an appropriate title</p> <p>Making a recommendation</p> <p>Applying the target structure <i>You can...</i></p> <p>Highlighting main points</p> <p>Expressing own opinions</p>
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Figure 9 An analysis of student work on the leaflet about tourist spots for the module “We Love Hong Kong”




Figure 10 A student proposed a KMB Club for the project of the module “Making Improvement”

Conclusion

With the significant intake of cross-border students in P4, teachers faced the challenge of catering for students’ diverse learning needs and different entry points in learning English. Through reorganising the textbook units, injecting an array of learning and teaching tasks and materials into the English Language curriculum, and utilising school and community resources, the learning space and time of both local and cross-border students were both expanded and enhanced. Thanks to the English teachers’ effort in addressing students’ needs and solving pedagogical and administrative obstacles, students’ knowledge, skills and values and attitudes were significantly built. To sustain the good practice, the English panel head and teachers will continue to review and revamp the school English Language curriculum, and extend the changes to P5 and P6 in the upcoming years.

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3.5 Learning beyond designated curriculum contents and lesson time

Background

The major concerns of Pui Ching Middle School were to enhance students' learning effectiveness and help students build up a purpose-driven life. In response to the recommendations of the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum (Task Force), the school reviewed and reorganised its school senior secondary curriculum to create space to address those concerns. The space created was utilised for implementing measures at the school level by offering co-curricular courses for all S4 students to address their diverse needs, interests and aspirations and in the school English Language curriculum by introducing self-directed learning (SDL) projects in S1-4, thereby broadening students' horizons, connecting their learning to real-life experiences, and building a stronger interface between the junior and senior secondary curricula.

Levels

S1-4

Strategies used

1. Infusing values education and Life Planning Education elements into the school curriculum to foster students' whole-person development

Through reading extensively and working on SDL projects with a focus on future study and career, S4 students were exposed to related subjects and a variety of jobs. The SDL tasks aimed at encouraging them to explore themselves and realise their potential, thereby helping them realise their dreams and set goals for the future. Positive values and attitudes were also infused into the S1-3 SDL projects through making use of reading and multimedia resources on everyday life events or topics such as saving the environment, growing up and friendship.

2. Maximising students' learning time by effectively reorganising learning experiences inside and outside the classroom

The Task Force recommended that learning time refers to not only classroom periods as students can gain learning experiences anywhere and anytime. The school holistically planned and arranged students' learning time to provide a variety of courses to cater for students' diverse needs and interests, and extended student learning outside lesson time through SDL. More opportunities were created for students to learn in order to allow them to get the most benefit out of learning inside and outside the classroom.

3. Enhancing students' SDL capabilities to develop them into autonomous lifelong learners

According to the *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6)* (2017), we should develop students' SDL capabilities and habit by giving them more autonomy in learning. English teachers encouraged students to set goals, decide on the topics of SDL projects and the investigation methods, and conduct reflections. Through this learning process, teachers helped students develop independence and a sense of responsibility.

Engagement in SDL projects enabled students to become more responsible for their own learning and to be lifelong learners.

What happened

School-level measures

As recommended in the Final Report of the Task Force, the school created space by reducing lessons from the senior secondary core subjects in S4 in 2021/22, which were transformed to a 3-lesson common block every Monday afternoon for a programme called “Journey for Knowledge” with a view to broadening students’ horizons and catering for their diverse interests and aspirations. The objectives of the programme were to:

- help students become active learners;
- expand their fields of knowledge and horizons;
- enhance their competence in integrating learning and keeping abreast of the times so as to cope with the ever-changing challenges in the future; and
- cultivate their enthusiasm and commitment to serve society.

Students may choose one course from the following list in each of the two terms in S4 (and also in S5 in 2022/23):

A. Humanities and Social Sciences	B. Mathematics, Science and Technology	C. Self-directed Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film Studies and Appreciation • Social Psychology and Psychotherapy • Basic English Phonetics and Phonology • Introduction to Sign Language and Service Learning Project • Introduction to Basic Japanese • Love Between the Lines: The Legendary Love Stories • Chinese Typography Design and Philology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Science in Daily Life • Introduction to Game Theory • Mathematics Application: Business and Social Science (1) • Career Exploration for Medicine and Healthcare Professions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are required to submit a detailed study plan for school approval if they would like to conduct their own research study.

Subject-level measures

To extend students’ learning from the classroom to beyond lesson time and to facilitate a smooth transition between Key Stages 3 and 4, English teachers incorporated SDL projects in the learning and teaching of reading skills in S1-4 to (a) motivate students to read and enable them to read deeper, (b) enable students to connect their learning in the English lessons to real-life experiences so as to promote positive values and attitudes (S1-3) and prepare them for future study (S4), thereby fostering their whole-person development, and (c) stretch the potential of students and cater for their diverse learning needs. Aiming at developing students into independent learners, the SDL projects engaged students in the following steps:

1. Set learning goals	Students studied a topic related to the theme of the SDL project concerned, and planned how to present their findings as well as selected what presentation skills to adopt.
2. Conduct research and read chosen texts	Students chose reading texts and applied the reading skills they had learnt. They kept reading logs to monitor their own learning progress.
3. Design and produce final products	Students organised their ideas and produced their final presentations.
4. Review the learning experience	Students completed reflection forms to evaluate their learning and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The SDL projects were designed alongside existing textbook units and themes to provide students with opportunities to apply their learning in meaningful contexts, enrich their learning experiences and enhance their learning motivation. The following table outlines the mapping among the S1-4 textbook themes, target reading skills, SDL project themes and learning elements to foster students' whole-person development.

Levels and terms	Textbook themes	Extending learning beyond lesson time		Fostering whole-person development
		Developing students' reading skills through flipped learning	Themes of SDL projects	Elements of values education (S1-3) or future study/career (S4) infused
S1 Term 1	We Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Locating information in a text ● Scanning for specific information, e.g. numerical data, sequencing events or steps 	Green living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responsibility ● Care for others
S1 Term 2	Amazing People, amazing deeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making predictions ● Understanding the setting and tones ● Using clues to work out meanings and other information 	Role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perseverance ● Commitment
S2 Term 1	Growing Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using prior knowledge in reading ● Understanding links between ideas ● Making predictions 	Growth mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy ● Perseverance
S2 Term 2	All about Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distinguishing facts from opinions 	Science for better living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responsibility ● Care for others

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying the main idea and supporting details in a paragraph 		
S3 Term 1	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working out the meanings of unfamiliar words ● Identifying topic sentences ● Making inferences 	Musicals/ Films with positive messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect for others ● Care for others
S3 Term 2	Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding stances and opinions ● Identifying text types, purposes of writing and stylistic features 	Healthy living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Care for others ● Commitment
S4 Term 1	Living Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding the setting and tones ● Distinguishing facts from opinions ● Identifying the main idea and supporting details in a paragraph ● Working out the meanings of unfamiliar words 	Living and housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Architecture ● Interior design ● Urban planning
S4 Term 2	Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying topic sentences ● Making inferences ● Understanding stances and opinions ● Identifying text types, purposes of writing, stylistic features and audience awareness 	Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economics ● Technology ● International trade

Impact

School level

The school curriculum was optimised not only to cater for learner diversity and foster students' whole-person development, but also to help students live a purpose-driven life, one of the school's major concerns which aims at encouraging students to explore themselves and realise their potential through setting and pursuing life goals. The "Journey for Knowledge" programme offered students curriculum options beyond designated curriculum contents and broadened their horizons, thereby enhancing their self-understanding in the learning process and formulating career or learning targets. Despite the fact that it was just the first-year implementation in S4, the observations below reveal that the courses addressed students' diverse needs, interests and aspirations:

- Students could make full use of their choices and study a total of 4 courses in S4 (2021/22) and S5 (2022/23).
- Students chose courses from different areas such as Humanities and Social Sciences and Mathematics, Science and Technology, which facilitated their balanced development.
- The courses were appealing to students as they showed more or less equal preferences for the choices available.

Subject level


New initiatives including flipped learning and SDL were infused into the school English Language curriculum to extend learning beyond lesson time. Teachers acted as facilitators who enabled students to gain the most benefit from learning, and encouraged students' active learning, engagement and ownership. For example, students were guided to learn at their own pace and according to their needs and interests, and were allowed to research SDL materials for preparation and presentation outside the classroom.



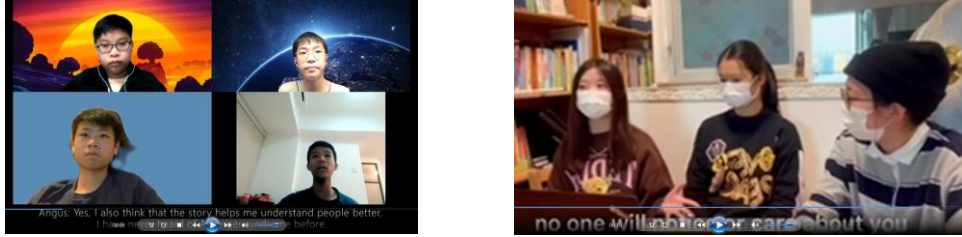
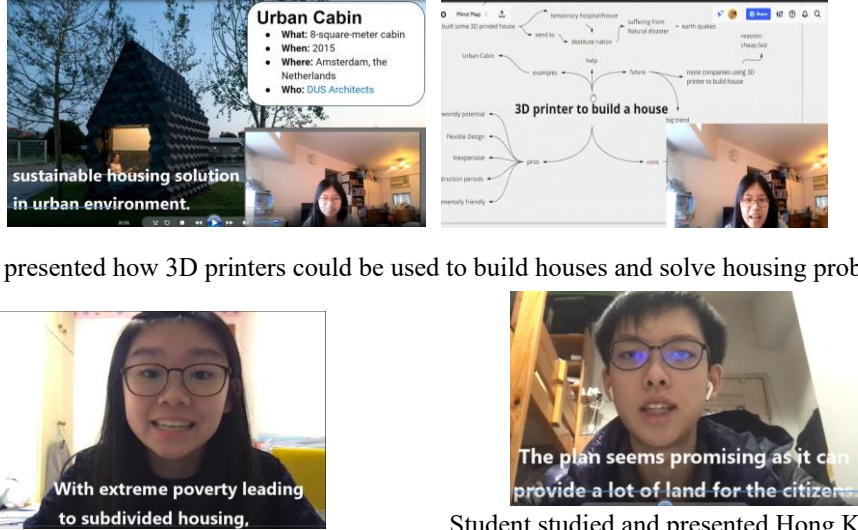
Other than extending learning beyond lesson time, a strong interface between the junior and senior secondary curricula was built through the following means:

- Developing a reading curriculum to ensure balanced skills coverage and progression
- Establishing a sound foundation of generic skills in preparation for lifelong learning through enhancing students' SDL capabilities and giving them timely feedback
- Fostering students' whole-person development from cultivating positive values and attitudes at the junior secondary level to prepare them for future study/career at the senior secondary level through the SDL projects

Student level

Students' diverse interests and aspirations were catered for by the range of final products of the SDL projects, including individual presentations, forums, TV shows, plays, interviews and news articles. With appropriate support and space given for learning, they were able to learn and apply relevant language skills (e.g. reading skills) and generic skills in meaningful contexts, and the learning outcomes, as illustrated in the following table, were impressive and demonstrated their high level of learner autonomy.

Levels and SDL project themes	Excerpts of student work
S1 Green living	 <p data-bbox="432 1937 1342 1968">Students were interviewed on their preferences for electric cars or gas-powered cars.</p>

	 <p style="text-align: center;">Students produced newspaper articles on environmental issues.</p>
<p>S2 Growth mindset</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Students had a forum on how the characters in the book “Little Women” grew up and learnt to overcome obstacles.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Students discussed problems the characters in the book “Wonder” encountered and how they should tackle challenges such as bullying.</p>
<p>S3 Musicals or films with positive messages</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Students learnt to help and understand others from the book “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Students acted out scenes of the book “Dear Evan Hansen” and showed care about others. (Click here to view the video.)</p>
<p>S4 Living and housing</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Student presented how 3D printers could be used to build houses and solve housing problems.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student explored problems of subdivided housing. (Click here to view the video.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Student studied and presented Hong Kong’s reclamation plan.</p>

From students’ self-reflection on their performance in the SDL projects, it is evident that their SDL capabilities (e.g. choosing a topic of interest, selecting appropriate learning materials and evaluating their own learning) were enhanced (see table below).

Statements	S1	S2	S3	S4
The topic I chose for the project was clear and well-focused.	96.4%	93.4%	91.5%	100%
I could select and read some texts and find useful information for my topic.	94.2%	96.7%	89.7%	98%
I could identify what I did well or not well and how to improve myself in the project.	95.9%	86.8%	87.2%	95.9%

Furthermore, students have also demonstrated positive values and attitudes towards a range of work and social issues covered through written reflections, revealing that the optimised curriculum has progressively prepared them for future work and studies as well as fostered whole-person development among them.

Levels	Students' reflections (original unedited)	Annotations
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Before this project, I knew global warming made an impact on the environment but I didn't realise how rapidly the climate changed. After research, I found lots of studies on possible resolutions on solving climate change. I should take my part in protecting the environment after this project.</i> • <i>I like reading books. My strength is to find important information. My weakness is to conclude my ideas. I would like to do similar projects to improve my weakness.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learnt to be responsible for environmental protection • Identified own strengths and weaknesses
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have learnt the importance of teamwork. When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.</i> • <i>I have cultivated a spirit of never giving up.</i> • <i>I enjoyed working with my classmates throughout the whole project. Many other projects have been cancelled because of the pandemic, this is a valuable chance to train my social and oral skills.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted positive values and attitudes • Developed language and generic skills
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have done a good job in playing the roles of characters and turning the story into a "TV programme". I wrote an ending with a moral so that audience can learn something from the programme.</i> • <i>It is an interesting book and taught me different moral lessons, for example, our family will stay beside us no matter there are ups and downs.</i> • <i>I like this kind of projects. I did well in cooperating with my teammates and I listened to their opinions.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared a moral in the final product • Promoted positive values • Developed positive attitudes
S4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have read more articles than I usually do and developed a better reading habit.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivated a reading habit

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The project helped me explore different social issues and societal values which I found refreshing and motivating.</i> • <i>Through the project, I have clearly discovered some of my weaknesses, for example, immature critical thinking skills and weak presentation skills. The advice and suggestions given by my teacher helped me pursue my next goal.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored issues and values • Identified own weaknesses and set learning goals
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Conclusion

In response to the recommendation to optimise the senior secondary core subjects, Pui Ching Middle School grasped the favourable opportunity to create space and implemented new measures in the curriculum at both school and English Language subject levels with a view to catering for students' diverse learning needs and fostering their whole-person development. The school management utilised teachers' expertise and human resources from different areas to offer curriculum options to facilitate students' broad and balanced development. At the subject level, English panel heads and teachers collaborated conscientiously to improve the school English Language curriculum and tried out new initiatives such as flipped learning and SDL projects to enrich student learning. They connected English learning in and beyond lessons and tied it in with values education and future study or career, so that students could relate English learning with their daily lives and build a purpose-driven life. The school has made students' learning benefits the priority of school development and would further review and develop the school curriculum based on ongoing evaluation. There is no doubt that their commitment to change and concerted efforts contributed greatly to effective school improvement, from which students would be the ultimate beneficiary.

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3.6 Sharpening high-flyers' writing and thinking skills in the assessment and feedback processes

Background

Assessment for learning (AfL) enables teachers to evaluate and improve the curriculum and teaching through students' learning evidence, and helps students understand what is expected, what is being learnt, and what has been achieved (The Curriculum Development Council, 2017). In line with the school's emphasis on AfL, English teachers of St. Clare's Girls' School used students' scripts to identify their learning needs in writing and plan the follow-up support for students to enhance their writing performance. Students' writing revealed two issues to be addressed: (1) logic of an argument and (2) organisation of ideas in paragraph writing. In 2020/21, S4 English teachers deployed varied strategies to develop students' higher-order thinking by enhancing their logical thinking and organisation skills for paragraph writing to boost their writing performance.

Level

S4

Strategies used

1. Using Bloom's Taxonomy to guide the planning of the project

Bloom's Taxonomy is commonly used for setting learning outcomes for assessment and instruction (Center for Learning Experimentation, Application, and Research, 2022). Learning tasks and activities of the project were designed according to the six levels of thinking skills, i.e. remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating.

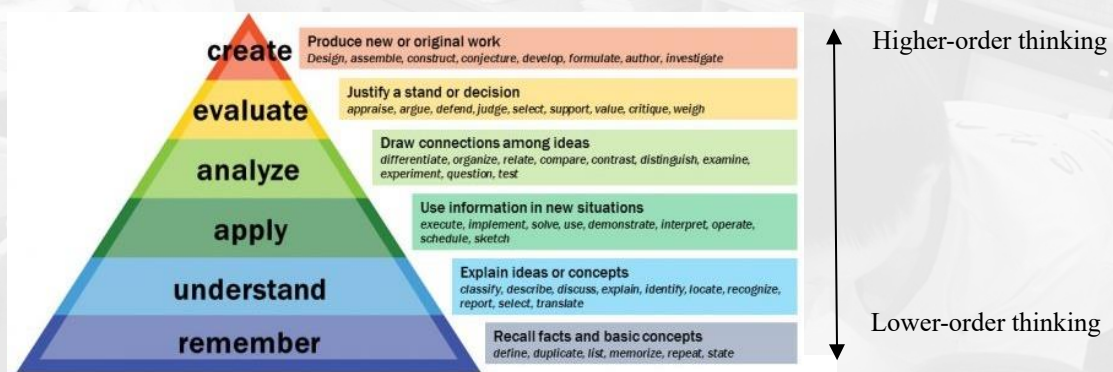


Figure 1 The latest version of Bloom's Taxonomy

Source: Armstrong, P. (2010). Bloom's Taxonomy. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching (released under a Creative Commons Attribution license)

2. Adopting the PEEL framework in paragraph writing

No matter what topic students write, they need to present their ideas logically and coherently and give relevant details to support their ideas. They should also focus on one idea in a body paragraph and back up the point with evidence (Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2016). In view of these, the teachers introduced a strategy, PEEL (**P**oint, **E**vidence, **E**laboration/Explanation and **L**ink), to strengthen students' body paragraph structure.

Point:	Make a point (i.e. writing a topic sentence).
Evidence:	Support the point with evidence.
Elaboration/Explanation:	Explain how the evidence supports the point.
Link:	Link this point to the main point/the next point in the following paragraph.

Adapted from <https://www.virtuallibrary.info/peel-paragraph-writing.html>

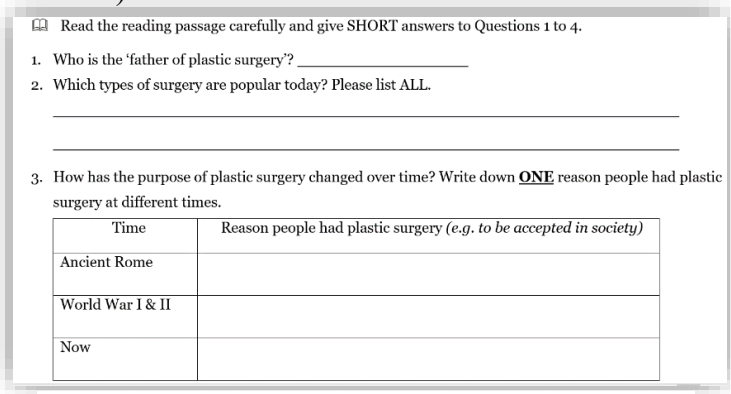
3. Diversifying assessment and feedback practices to strengthen students' thinking and writing skills

Assessment and feedback are essential to planning, learning, teaching and evaluation. In addition to using conventional pen-and-paper assessments, the teachers used a range of assessments such as debates and self-reflections to evaluate student learning and plan the follow-up support. Giving students formative feedback can enhance students' knowledge, skills and understanding towards certain areas of content and general skills (Shute, 2007, as cited in Lam, 2013). Formative feedback can be in different forms (e.g. verbal feedback), and is usually given regularly during lessons (Lam, 2013). Through carefully-designed tasks and activities, S4 teachers provided opportunities for students to receive timely feedback in different forms (e.g. peer assessment, an online feedback session) to improve their students' writing and thinking skills.

What happened

1. Designing tasks to stretch students' cognitive skills

By making reference to Bloom's Taxonomy, S4 English teachers designed tasks and activities to enhance student learning at all six levels. The table below shows examples of how some levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were used at different stages:

Levels	Stages	Examples								
Remembering	Pre-writing	<p>To help students understand the topic “plastic surgery” from multiple perspectives (e.g. historical development, a surgeon, teenagers), teachers provided them with reading texts and online videos, and designed some comprehension questions requiring students to answer by retrieving information from the materials, (see Picture 1).</p>  <p>Read the reading passage carefully and give SHORT answers to Questions 1 to 4.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who is the ‘father of plastic surgery’? _____ Which types of surgery are popular today? Please list ALL. _____ _____ How has the purpose of plastic surgery changed over time? Write down ONE reason people had plastic surgery at different times. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Time</th> <th>Reason people had plastic surgery (e.g. to be accepted in society)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Ancient Rome</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>World War I & II</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Now</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Time	Reason people had plastic surgery (e.g. to be accepted in society)	Ancient Rome		World War I & II		Now	
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Now										
Understanding	Pre-writing	<p>After doing two pre-tasks which helped them understand different stakeholders’ viewpoints on plastic surgery, students summarised the benefits and possible risks of plastic surgery to demonstrate their understanding of the topic (see Attachment 1).</p>								
Applying	Pre-, while- and post-writing	<p>Students learnt how to write a rebuttal paragraph of a debate speech in a three-step approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Summarising the opposing ideas Acknowledging the valid part Refuting the opposing view by providing evidence (e.g. examples, facts, statistics) <p>Students then applied the above techniques in the pre-writing tasks, the writing task itself and an online writing conference.</p>								
Analysing	Pre-writing	<p>Based on the online videos and a reading text given in Pre-task 1 and Pre-task 2, students inferred different stakeholders’ attitudes towards plastic surgery in Pre-task 3 (See Attachment 1).</p>								
Evaluating	Pre-writing	<p>Students evaluated the surgeon and the psychologist’s ideas by using the “I see, I think, I wonder” approach to construct their own views on the topic (see “2. Think” in Picture 2). They could also formulate some questions to help them evaluate if plastic surgery was beneficial or harmful, encouraging them to find more evidence to support their views (See the two examples in “3. Wonder” in Picture 2).</p>								

Levels	Stages	Examples
		<p style="text-align: center;">See, Think, Wonder?</p> <p>1. See...</p> <p><u>Pros</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) help with deformities 2) ↑ self-esteem 3) be acceptable <p><u>Cons</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) complications 2) self-esteem? <p>× change people's life in a good way (sometimes)</p> <p>2. Think</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Cosmetic surgery has both benefits and disadvantages. 2) We should have that (plastic surgery) in a good way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We use it. × We are used by it. <p>3. Wonder??</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Can plastic surgery really increase people's self-esteem? 2) Under what circumstances should we have plastic surgery? <p>Picture 2 A student using the “I see, I think, I wonder” approach to make her own judgement (edited and retyped)</p>
Creating	While-writing	Students produced their own debate speech with the motion “all plastic surgery should be banned” by applying what they had learnt (e.g. rebuttal techniques, PEEL).

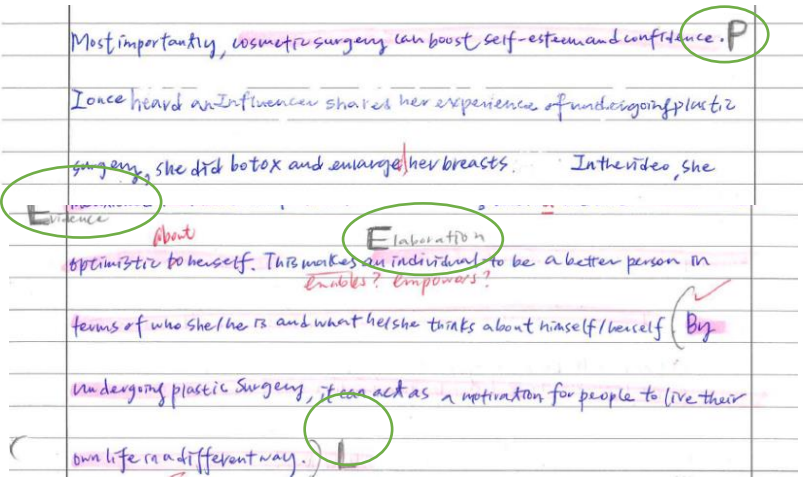

2. Using scaffolds to build up and reinforce students’ writing technique

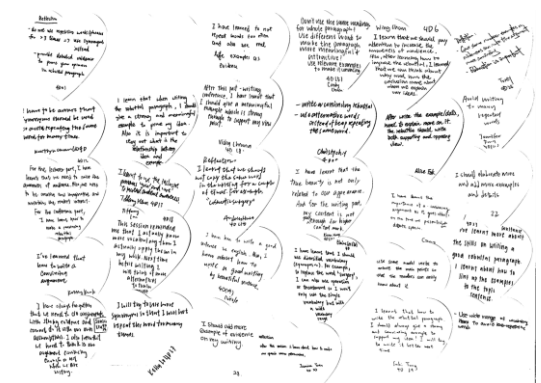
To enhance students’ paragraph writing, teachers designed scaffolding activities to help them understand what PEEL is and how to use it. The scaffolding activities were designed with reference to Bloom’s Taxonomy:

Levels	Activities
Remembering	Students learnt about basic concepts of PEEL through definitions and explicit teaching.
Understanding	Students identified the PEEL elements in a body paragraph of a sample writing through highlighting, underlining, bracketing and circling.
Applying and Creating	Students used PEEL to create a new body paragraph for the sample writing as a form of practice.

3. Designing varied assessment tasks to enhance student learning

Besides the writing task and the final examination, teachers designed other meaningful tasks and activities to strengthen students’ writing and thinking as well as sharpen their metacognitive skills.

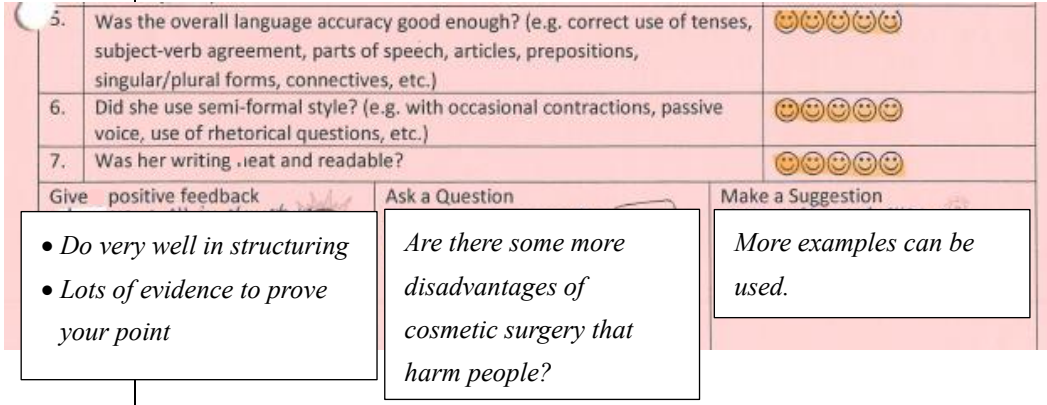

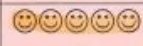
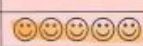
Tasks/Activities	Details
<p>Post-writing tasks</p>	<p>Students were asked to identify and label the four elements of PEEL in their peers' writing for reinforcement (see Picture 3).</p>  <p>Picture 3 A student identifying and labelling the PEEL elements in peer's writing (unedited work)</p> <p>Teachers also designed post-writing tasks based on their own students' areas for improvement. Students in an S4 class were asked to review and rewrite body paragraphs of their debate speech using PEEL. In another class, students were asked to identify the problems of the ideas given by their teacher and rewrite them where necessary.</p>
<p>Debates</p>	<p>An intra-class mini-debate was conducted during English lessons. Expectations such as maintaining eye contact and giving examples were clearly communicated to students. In the debate, students needed to transfer the knowledge and skills learnt (e.g. paragraph structure, development of arguments, rebuttal techniques) from writing to speaking. The activity also stretched their thinking skills by requiring them to find flaws in the opposing side's arguments, and present their analyses and judgements by providing sound and valid evidence. Furthermore, students were asked to decide if the affirmative or negative team won the debate, which required them to evaluate each side's performance as members of the audience.</p>  <p>Picture 4 Students transferring their knowledge and skills from writing to speaking</p>

Tasks/Activities	Details
Self-reflection	<p>After attending an online feedback session on the writing task, students wrote short reflections on post-it notes about their learning such as what they had learnt, what they once forgot but recalled through revisiting what had learnt (see Picture 5).</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Picture 5 Students' self-reflections on their learning</p>

1. Using rubrics to facilitate self-reflection and giving of constructive feedback

Clear assessment criteria for the debate and the writing task were set to enable students to reflect on their own performance in a more focused manner. Feedback from teachers and peers, with reference to the same set of criteria presented in the form of descriptors and checklists, helped students make targeted improvement.

Parties involved	Forms of feedback	Major tasks done																								
Teachers	Scores and descriptors	<p>In addition to giving scores on students' writing, teachers used an analytic rubric to mark the debate speeches. Part of the rubric is shown in Picture 6. Teachers ticked the boxes next to descriptors that could best describe students' writing. With the rubric, students could better understand their actual performance, encouraging them to set a higher goal and think about how to make improvement for the next writing task.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="523 1388 1396 1691"> <thead> <tr> <th>Lv.</th> <th>Content (C)</th> <th>Language (L)</th> <th>Organisation (O)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="3">6</td> <td>18 <input type="checkbox"/> Content fulfils the requirements of the question <input type="checkbox"/> Almost totally relevant</td> <td>18 <input type="checkbox"/> Wide range of accurate sentence structures, with a good grasp of simple and complex sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar mainly accurate with occasional common errors that do not affect overall clarity</td> <td>18 <input type="checkbox"/> Text is organised effectively, with logical development of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Cohesion in most parts of the text is clear</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17 <input type="checkbox"/> Most ideas are well developed/supported <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and imagination are shown when appropriate</td> <td>17 <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary is wide, with many examples of more sophisticated lexis (=words)</td> <td>17 <input type="checkbox"/> Strong cohesive ties throughout the text</td> </tr> <tr> <td>16 <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains the reader's interest and shows general awareness of audience</td> <td>16 <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling and punctuation are mostly correct <input type="checkbox"/> Register, tone and style are appropriate to the genre and text-type</td> <td>16 <input type="checkbox"/> Overall structure is coherent, sophisticated and appropriate to the genre and text-type</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">5</td> <td>15 <input type="checkbox"/> Content addresses the requirements of the question adequately <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly relevant</td> <td>15 <input type="checkbox"/> A range of accurate sentence structures with some attempts to use more complex sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Grammatical errors occur in more complex structures but overall clarity not affected</td> <td>15 <input type="checkbox"/> Text is mostly organised effectively, with logical development of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Cohesion in most parts of the text is clear</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14 <input type="checkbox"/> Some ideas are well developed/supported <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and imagination are shown in most parts when appropriate</td> <td>14 <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary is moderately wide and used appropriately</td> <td>14 <input type="checkbox"/> Sound cohesive ties throughout the text</td> </tr> <tr> <td>13 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly maintains the reader's interest and shows awareness of audience</td> <td>13 <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling and punctuation are sufficiently accurate to convey meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Register, tone and style are mostly appropriate to the genre and text-type</td> <td>13 <input type="checkbox"/> Overall structure is coherent and appropriate to the genre and text-type</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Picture 6 The rubric teachers used to mark students' debate speeches</p>	Lv.	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	Written	<p>Specific comments on students' writing in different areas (e.g. use of PEEL and rhetorical questions, relevance and development of ideas and audience awareness) were given. In the post-writing tasks where the paragraphs were reviewed and rewritten, students received teachers' written feedback on, for example, the evidence and the tone.</p>																								

Parties involved	Forms of feedback	Major tasks done						
	Oral	Verbal feedback was given after each round of the intra-class debates. Students received comments on different aspects including the development of ideas, techniques used (e.g. rhetorical questions, examples and rebuttal), delivery and communication strategies (e.g. eye contact and voice), helping them improve their organising, thinking and speaking skills.						
Students	Checklist and written	<p>Peer assessment was conducted for students to review more critically their peers' work. They were given a peer evaluation form (see Attachment 2) which aligned with what students learnt in the project to evaluate each other's work against the task requirements. They were also asked to give written feedback on their classmates' writing (see Picture 7).</p>  <p>5. Was the overall language accuracy good enough? (e.g. correct use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, parts of speech, articles, prepositions, singular/plural forms, connectives, etc.) </p> <p>6. Did she use semi-formal style? (e.g. with occasional contractions, passive voice, use of rhetorical questions, etc.) </p> <p>7. Was her writing neat and readable? </p> <table border="1" data-bbox="391 1019 1412 1243"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="391 1019 758 1064">Give positive feedback</th> <th data-bbox="758 1019 1077 1064">Ask a Question</th> <th data-bbox="1077 1019 1412 1064">Make a Suggestion</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="391 1064 758 1243"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do very well in structuring • Lots of evidence to prove your point </td> <td data-bbox="758 1064 1077 1243"> <p>Are there some more disadvantages of cosmetic surgery that harm people?</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1077 1064 1412 1243"> <p>More examples can be used.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Give positive feedback	Ask a Question	Make a Suggestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do very well in structuring • Lots of evidence to prove your point 	<p>Are there some more disadvantages of cosmetic surgery that harm people?</p>	<p>More examples can be used.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do very well in structuring • Lots of evidence to prove your point 	<p>Are there some more disadvantages of cosmetic surgery that harm people?</p>	<p>More examples can be used.</p>						
	Written	<p>In the online feedback session, teachers showed two arguments that opposed the ban of plastic surgery by looking at the higher employment rate and patients' poor relationships with families and friends. The teacher then led students to evaluate if each argument was convincing, and if not, which part was not convincing enough, enabling students to think logically and critically. Picture 8 below shows two students' feedback given on the arguments:</p> <div data-bbox="518 1646 1412 1926" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p>Student A's comment: No, because she [the classmate] didn't clearly explain the relationship between the unemployment rate and plastic surgery.</p> <p>Student B's comment: No, the relationship between costly plastic surgery and worsened family relationship is not well-explained.</p> </div> <p>Picture 8 Students giving comments on whether an argument is convincing in the online lesson (edited and retyped)</p>						

Impact

Curriculum level

The incorporation of Bloom's Taxonomy, the PEEL framework for writing and enhanced assessment and feedback practices provided a clear and progressive structure to build up students' higher-order thinking skills and self-evaluation capabilities. Through strategic design of tasks that promoted critical thinking, detailed planning for writing and speaking as well as reflective learning, the learning capabilities of more able students have been further stretched. In addition, teachers may also adopt these strategies in other levels to enhance vertical and coherence of the school English Language curriculum.

Student level

Students' understanding about and application of PEEL was consolidated, as shown in Picture 3 and another piece of student work (see Picture 9):

<p>Secondly, the motion violates the right to the freedom of individual choice, Eliza Schuyler, a leading plastic surgeon at the American Cosmetic Surgery Association, says that psychological tests and extensive one-on-one consultation is conducted before operations to ensure the client is fully aware of the risks, as well as the consequences and responsibilities they need to bear. This signature on the consent document goes to show that people do in fact maturely assess the risks and potential consequences before making the decision to have cosmetic surgery. As long as they are mature enough to know and think clearly about what they're doing, why should they be robbed of their right to choose?</p>	<p>Secondly, the motion violates the right to the freedom of individual choice [Point]. Eliza Schuyler, a leading plastic surgeon at the American Cosmetic Surgery Association, says that psychological tests and extensive one-on-one consultation is (are) conducted before operations to ensure the client is (clients are) fully aware of the risks, as well as the consequences of responsibilities they need to bear [Evidence] This goes to show (This illustrates) that people do in fact maturely assess the risks and potential consequences before making the decision to have cosmetic surgery [Elaboration/Explanation]. As long as they are mature enough to know and think clearly about what they are doing, why should they be robbed of their right to choose [Link]?</p>
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Picture 9 A student applying PEEL in writing the debate speech (edited and retyped)

Teachers' written comments on the body paragraphs of students' debate speeches and their observations on students' performance in the examination also revealed that students could apply the strategy in writing. A teacher commented that students could give examples as evidence, one important element in PEEL, to back up their viewpoints in the debates. Students' thinking skills were also enhanced as shown in the debates and the online writing conference. Students became more conscious of the logical flow of their own and others' arguments.

Moreover, students have become more reflective in the learning process. Writing a short self-reflection enabled students to evaluate their own learning progress and set further learning goals. As shown in Pictures 10 and 11, the two students wanted to improve their arguments by making them more convincing, which also became one of the students' goal in her future writing (see Picture 11).

I always forgot that we needed to write arguments with strong evidence, and we should not write them with our own assumptions. I learnt that we need to think if our arguments are convincing enough or not when writing.

Picture 10 A student identifying her area for improvement (edited work)

Area for improvement:
Providing strong evidence/convincing examples

I learnt how to write the rebuttal paragraph. I should always give a strong and convincing example to support my idea! I will try to write it better next time.

Learning goal for the next writing

Picture 11 Another student making an attempt to identify the area for improvement and setting a goal for her next writing (edited work)

Teacher level

Teachers became more reflective language teaching professionals in the project. In co-planning meetings, teachers exchanged innovative ideas and teaching strategies (e.g. the “I think, I see, I wonder” approach) to enhance student learning. Using Bloom’s Taxonomy to guide planning, teachers could design tasks and activities of different complexity levels, and be more aware of catering for learner diversity (e.g. students’ interests) in material design. Teachers’ assessment literacy was also enhanced as a wider range of data from assessments were collected for teachers to inform learning and teaching.

Conclusion


While the strategies were effectively tried out in the S4 English Language curriculum to enrich the knowledge and generic skills for the more able students, the school may consider developing the curricula of other levels in both breadth and depth through adopting an even wider range of assessment modes (e.g. helping students build up individual writing portfolios), setting more concrete goals based on their strengths and areas for improvement, and further sharpening their skills in critically evaluating different viewpoints. Through increasing the level of challenge and activating students’ thinking, the potential of different learners can be maximised.

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