

Unleashing the Potential of Reading-to-Writing Cycles: A Journey of Curriculum Renewal at the Interface of KS1 and KS2

Speakers

School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section, Education Bureau –

Dr TSANG Chun-sum, Samuel

Sung Tak Wong Kin Sheung Memorial School –

Ms YANG Oi-lan, Anna

Ms YIP Nga-ting, Natalie

Introduction

Over the past few decades, extensive research has explored and established the reading-writing relations and connections through the lens of education psychology and applied linguistics (e.g. Widdowson, 1978; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Shanahan, 2006), whilst contributing to evidence-based models of literacy development around the globe (e.g. *Interactive Dynamic Literacy Model* by Kim, 2020; *Direct and Indirect Effects Model of Writing* by Kim & Graham, 2022). These efforts underscore the importance of creating and harnessing synergistic connections between reading (as input) and writing (as output), which has all along been a vital pillar in English language and literacy development.

In Hong Kong, the *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6)* prepared by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) (2017) emphasises amongst other key recommendations the learning and teaching of text grammar, which serves to scaffold and develop students' abilities to 'understand the features associated with a particular text type and apply the knowledge acquired in writing and creating relevant texts' (p. 69). In other words, opportunities for students' engagement with texts (through **reading**-focused learning activities) and subsequent application of related learning (through **writing**-focused learning activities) need to be created to enrich their English learning experiences. This, no doubt, has formed the basis of why and how reading-to-writing cycles could be continually optimised and updated to sustain the accomplishments achieved over the years as well as to prepare students for the 21st century.

More recently, with the release of the *Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version)* in 2022, the CDC further delineates major directions and updated learning goals, whilst setting out major renewed emphases. In essence, all primary schools are expected to sustain the momentum of “Learning to Learning 2+” and deepen the outcomes of good practices in light of students’ growth and learning needs. In particular, curriculum leaders and teachers are encouraged to continue to heed the principles of “organic integration”, “natural connection”, “diversified strategies”, “mutual coordination”, “learning within and beyond the classroom”, and “whole-school participation” in curriculum development and renewal. Also, of particulate note is the renewed emphasis on the importance of cultivating an interest in extensive reading and an active reading habit, with a view to fostering self-directed and lifelong learners.

Taken together, to support the ongoing renewal of the school curriculum of which English Language Education (ELE) is an integral part, the curriculum leaders and English teachers of Sung Tak Wong Kin Sheung Memorial School have collaborated with the School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section in optimising ELE reading-to-writing cycles in Primary 3 (P3) (in the 2022/23 school year) and Primary 4 (P4) (in the 2023/24 school year) as an entry point in furtherance of major renewed emphases, school priorities, and other curriculum initiatives.

School and Project Background

Established in 1985, Sung Tak Wong Kin Sheung Memorial School is an aided school operating 24 classes. Located in the district of Tai Po, the School serves students of different socioeconomic backgrounds from neighbouring estates. The School places great emphasis on a holistic education as well as the integral formation of the whole person. Major concerns for 2021/22 s.y. to 2023/24 s.y. are “Active learning: Widen dimensions of learning” and “Learn proactively: Explore the wonders of life”. The School has regularly availed itself of support services rendered by the Education Bureau and local tertiary institutions.

Since the 2022/23 school year, the School has been collaborating with the School-based development (Primary) Section to optimise its ELE curriculum with an emphasis on reading and writing in P3 and P4 (i.e. at the interface of Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2)) in alignment with recommendations from the relevant curriculum guides as well as school priorities. Needless to say, this collaboration should also be contextualised against the unprecedented challenges posed to language learning by the COVID-

19 pandemic. Foundation of students' English language development was found to be adversely affected by limited in-person interactions and reduced access to authentic language learning resources. Through lesson preparation meetings and lesson study cycles, a dedicated team of teachers and curriculum development officers have worked collaboratively to plan, implement, and evaluate learning and teaching (L&T) materials and activities as part of the optimisation effort.

In particular, a series of principles were derived through both top-down and bottom-up means. The top-down approach involves reviewing various curriculum documents (i.e. curriculum guides, the Learning Progression Framework, and related resource kits) and scholarly research. In tandem, through implementation and evaluation, bottom-up principles were generated to complement top-down visions. Key principles to guide the present collaboration are as follows –

1. Promoting **text grammar** and **blended learning**
2. Adopting **age-appropriate pedagogies**
3. Fostering learning with **incremental scaffolding**
4. Connecting language learning and teaching to **real life**
5. Infusing **values education** into the ELE curriculum
6. Creating opportunities for “**assessment as learning**”
7. Extending students' learning experiences through **cross-curricular** and **experiential learning**
8. Catering for learner diversity through **differentiated materials and instruction**
9. Facilitating **peer appreciation** and **learning**

On the whole, concerted effort was made in optimising reading-to-writing cycles by making more coherent connections between reading (as input) and writing (as output). Through selection, integration and adaptation of various resources (Figure 1), conditions have been created to provide students with (i) **diversified, age-appropriate and meaningful learning experiences** and (ii) **opportunities to be exposed to, and use, English purposefully**, with a view to contributing further to student learning. An important caveat is that implementing reading-to-writing cycles does not mean a sole emphasis on reading and writing. Instead, it aims to underscore the importance of creating and harnessing the connections between input and output in language learning, whilst deeming authentic and integrative use of language skills as integral to the learning process, as will be further illustrated below.



Figure 1: Selection, Integration and Adaptation of Various Resources

Highlights from P3

In P3, take the module of “Caring and Sharing” as an example, a general reading-to-writing sequence started with the textbook passage (i.e. a diary entry) through which students were exposed to – and practised – vocabulary and grammar in context. In order to consolidate and deepen student learning, a Reading and Writing Booklet was designed and complemented with task-based language learning activities with emphasis on meaning and authenticity in an incremental and age-appropriate manner. This process of enablement proved effective in scaffolding students’ abilities to use vocabulary and language forms in the module-end writing task. In what follows, key enhanced aspects will be introduced to shed light on how this particular given reading-to-writing cycle was optimised –

Adopting age-appropriate pedagogies

As the CDC (2017) reminds, it is possible to provide opportunities for students to experience “pleasurable and age-appropriate English activities (e.g. games, songs)” (p.45), with a view to easing the transition process and sustaining students’ interest in learning English at different stages of schooling. In this connection, the P3 ELE curriculum was invigorated by interspersing the learning process with opportunities for enjoyable and engaging learning experiences. In this module, the simple past form was a key language focus – rather than learning it formally, students could practise and consolidate verb conjugation and pronunciation through a series of games and songs. For example, Past Tense Song was

selected to enable students to notice patterns associated with common verbs. Students then viewed and performed the song with simple gestures, which helped deepen their learning of the simple past form in a fun and pleasurable way (see Figure 2).

Past Tense Song
(a collaborative activity)

listen, listened; stay, stayed; jump, jumped; play, played; talk, talked; look, looked. Please add 'e-d'.

chat, chatted; clap, clapped; skip, skipped; hop, hopped; pat, patted; stop, stopped. Add 't' or 'p' and 'e-d'.

tidy, tidied; dry, dried; try, tried; fry, fried; study, studied; cry, cried. Change 'y' to 'i-e-d'.

give, gave; sing, sang; drink, drank; swim, swam; draw, drew; ride, rode. You need to change the vowel.

Source: Longman Leap, 3B
Tune: Skip to my lou

‘...appreciate the beauty of the language through enjoying singing English songs and reading simple rhymes...’
(ELE KLA CG, 2017)

Students from the four classes sang the past tense song together with simple gestures. This enables them to deepen their learning of the simple past tense form in a fun and pleasurable way!

Figure 2: Performing of the Past Tense Song

Fostering learning with incremental scaffolding

Every reading-to-writing cycle should be structured with incremental scaffolding. In other words, learning is best fostered cumulatively through appropriable tasks to “engage students in constructing knowledge actively and progressively, as well as to provide appropriate support and scaffolding to facilitate students’ successful completion of the tasks” (CDC, 2017, p.91).

To achieve this in the learning of feeling words and related actions, a series of cumulative tasks were designed to enable learners to deepen their learning of the language focus from the word level to the paragraph level (see Figure 3). Students first engaged in a matching activity at the word level, where they formed associations between the feeling words and respective actions. Then, they engaged in a sentence-level task where they needed to write sentences with supporting details. Finally, students practised target usage more holistically at the level of a paragraph.

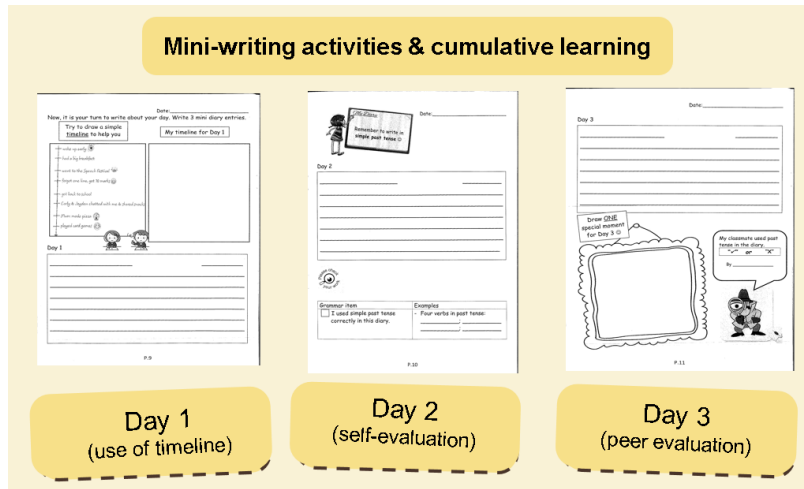


Figure 3: From the Word Level to the Paragraph Level

Here is another example. As students delved deeper into the diary entry as a text type (characterised by the use of simple past tense, as well as pairing of feeling words with supporting details, which were language foci to be consolidated), students engaged in writing mini-diary entries (see Figure 4). This, from teacher observation, had two key benefits. First, it allowed students to have a taste of writing English diary entries in succession (in lieu of a one-time occurrence), which in turn familiarised them with – and enabled them to experience the fun of – recording their lives in English. Second, students could receive regular feedback and this deepened their learning cumulatively. Teachers could also get timely evidence on student learning to adjust L&T, which served as an effective form of “assessment *for* learning”.

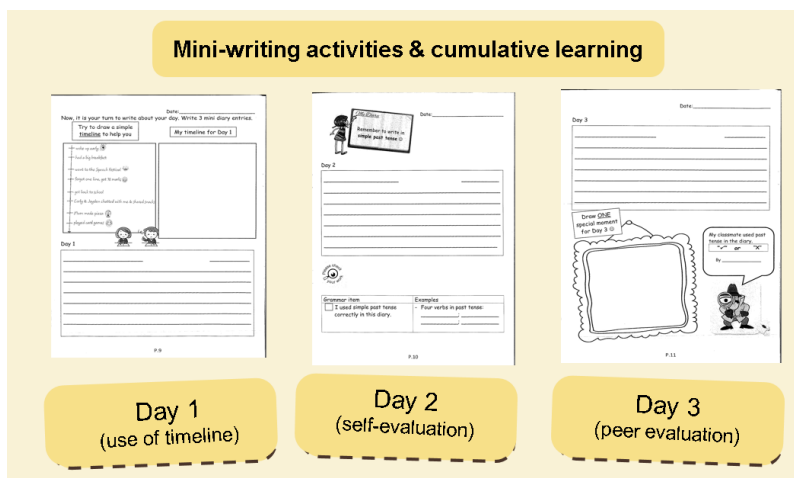


Figure 4: Mini-writing and Cumulative Learning

Connecting language learning and teaching to real life

Considering that “[l]anguage learning and teaching should always be connected to real life” (CDC, 2017, p.57), a collaborative task “What happened last Thursday” was designed to heighten the relevance of the simple past tense form to students’ school life, whilst tapping into students’ integrative use of language skills (see Figure 5). Prior to it, teachers documented students’ school life and key moments on a given Thursday, such that they became reference points for the group activity. The general flow of the activity roughly included the following five stages: (i) activating students’ prior knowledge through a language game and the Past Tense Song (i.e. reading and viewing), (ii) introducing the context and task through rich questioning, (iii) reminding students of genre-based learning from earlier lessons, (iv) conducting interactive writing circles through heterogeneous grouping (i.e. writing), and (v) facilitating feedback exchanges through group presentations (i.e. speaking and listening).

It should be noted that such a learning activity took place alongside the use of the Reading and Writing Booklet. Upon partaking in the above collaborative task, students would individually write about their daily lives as part of the mini-diary entries described above. Also, mixed-ability grouping enabled peers to learn from and support one another. It was very gratifying to observe that more able and less able peers worked together to successfully complete the assigned task.

What happened last Thursday?

Promotion of pupil participation and peer learning through group activities
(i.e. writing circles and group presentations)

Use of the simple past form is now meaningfully relevant to their everyday lives 😊

Figure 5: “What happened last Thursday?”, a collaborative task

Glimpses of students learning

It was found that the optimised sequences of learning tasks and activities coincided with a range of improved learning outcomes, noticeably gains in quantity and quality of writing. In particular, their general willingness to communicate and write, and uptake of target vocabulary and structures were observed. It is also worth noting that these gains (e.g. consistent use of the simple past form as well as pairing of feeling words with actions) were transferred to another piece of writing task (i.e. a recount of someone's birthday) and that sustained progress was found in the year-end assessment (see Figure 6). Moreover, students improved in their attitudes and motivation towards learning English. From teacher observation and informal interviews with students, students became more motivated to learn English and they showed high engagement in the learning process. Needless to say, more rigorous research remains necessary to confirm these preliminary findings, yet the preponderance of student assessment data and observations strongly suggests the efficacy of the optimised reading-to-writing cycle.

1st term Writing 1 A Bad Day

It is a sunny day. Toby goes to the football pitch. Toby plays football with his friends. They kick the ball. They are so excited. The weather changes suddenly. It is cloudy. They do not know. It is raining heavily. They do not have umbrellas. They all get wet. Toby says, "Oh! Let's run to the supermarket." In the end, Toby runs to the supermarket. Toby is shopping. After a while, Toby runs back home. He is so hungry.

1st term Writing 2 A New School Event

Book Week is on the thirteenth of October. It is for everyone - students and teachers. I love Book Week because I want everyone to read more books in their free time. During that week, we can read books and tell stories to everyone. We share books with our schoolmates in the school. We feel excited. Book Week is great because I like reading books.

2nd term Writing 3 Writing Task—My Mother's Day

Line to think of some ideas.
Entry for your Mother's Day with the help of the timeline.

14th May 2022 (Sunday) Sunny ☀

I got up before Mum because it was Mother's Day. I wanted to give Mum a surprise. Mum said I went to KFC. Mum and I ate breakfast. We had First, eggs, orange juice and sandwiches. Mum was happy because she had a big smile on her face. In the afternoon, we went shopping in Happy Shop. It was big. I bought a purse and a towel for Mum. Mum was happy because she likes the red purse. I went home suddenly. Mum gave me a big hug and a kiss. We ate a yummy dinner. The noodles tasted really good! I gave her a card. Finally, we were happy. I was happy because I liked my Mother's Day so much.

Figure 6: A student's progression over time

Highlights from P4

Riding on the initial successes of the optimisation in P3, curriculum leaders and English teachers became more encouraged to experiment with the various ways through which reading-to-writing cycles could be reimagined and enhanced. For example, in the module of “Changes”, students learnt vocabulary and language forms relating to Hong Kong in the old days through a time travel journal, an imaginative type text that presented both challenges and opportunities. Challenges mainly stem from students’ unfamiliarity with concepts connected with old Hong Kong, and students in previous cohorts had struggled in general to engage with the topic and writing task. That said, teachers saw great opportunities in harnessing the reading-to-writing cycle to promote engagement, whilst creating opportunities for values education, assessment literacy, and cross-curricular learning. Key enhanced features relating to the module will be illustrated below –

Catering for learner diversity through differentiated materials and instruction

It should be noted that Reading and Writing Booklets developed for P4 were differentiated to align better with the School’s streaming arrangement in KS2. This has enabled teachers to extend and stretch the abilities of more capable learners through tasks requiring higher-order thinking skills, whilst putting in place scaffolding (e.g. hints, reminders, visual cues) and suitable adaptation (e.g. quantity and difficulty levels of learning items) to nurture the growth of students requiring additional support. Differentiated materials could help create synergy with teachers’ differentiated instructions, thereby enabling students of varying abilities to engage with input and output in manners conducive to their growth.

Promoting blended and cross-curricular learning



As pointed out earlier, students’ general unfamiliarity with concepts could prevent them from engaging with the topic. To mitigate this, teachers complemented textbook learning with CoSpaces (see Figure 7). Through this e-platform, a tailor-made experience was created in relation to the places that were mentioned in the reading text. This provided students with multimodal experiences (e.g. images, sounds, and other semiotic resources) and enabled them to visualise old Hong Kong and its history more concretely, hence enhancing their understanding of the text. In tandem, much was done to transcend the walls of the language classroom by making use of life-wide and cross-curricular learning. Working with the subject

of General Studies (see Figure 8), a visit was organised for P4 students to Ping Shan Heritage Trail where students could learn more about the study hall and education system in old Hong Kong.

Supplemented with CoSpaces

'...teachers can integrate e-learning in the design of learning, teaching and assessment activities to **complement the traditional mode of learning**, enhance learning and teaching effectiveness, and accommodate the diverse needs of students....'
(ELE KLA CG, 2017)

'...students read/view **printed and multimodal texts** to locate relevant information and main ideas and present them through different media....'
(ELE KLA CG, 2017)

Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park

Figure 7: Use of CoSpaces and Multimodal Text

**Life-wide and cross-curricular learning
(with the subject of GS)**

Through this, students could learn more about the study hall and education system in old Hong Kong.



Figure 8: Visit to Ping Shan Heritage Trail

Promoting text grammar

To promote text grammar in alignment with the optimised approach in P3, teachers became more adept at adapting modelling texts to cater for learner diversity, as well as to build upon previous student learning. Apart from engaging in text exploration and noticing activities aimed at promoting text grammar, students were supported to deconstruct the text and practise reading skills (e.g. inferencing and information extraction) with the aid of a graphic organiser (see Figure 9). This enabled them to learn about a hitherto unfamiliar text type, whilst promoting reading development. It was observed that, building upon the foundation laid through previous reading-to-writing cycles, students became able to deconstruct the text independently.

Deconstruction of the modelling text

Mission: Were there any supermarkets 60 years ago?

Today the time machine took me to Central in 1958. I was surprised because there weren't any supermarkets. Could you believe that?

I went to a wet market on the street. When I entered it, I saw many stalls. It was quite dirty. I could smell meat and fish everywhere. Nobody used shopping bags. Everybody used bamboo baskets. Also, I saw a lot of children in the market. They walked around and many of them weren't with their parents. In those days, children could take care of themselves!

<p>Everybody used bamboo baskets to carry their food. That's better than plastic!</p>	<p>An old woman used a piece of straw to carry a fish. How interesting!</p>	<p>This girl was only 7 years old but she could take care of her brother.</p>
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It was interesting to see what Central was like 60 years ago. Life was not easy in the past but people kept working hard. They never gave up! I felt happy because I enjoyed talking with the children in the market. They were amazing and friendly!

By Peter Lee 4C

Setting of mission

Opening

Main body

Captions

Ending

It should be noted that the modelling texts were strategically adapted to cater for learner diversity, as well as to build upon previous student learning.

Figure 9: Adaptation of the Modelling Text

Infusing values education into ELE

All along, dovetailing with the curriculum guides, the School accords high priority to values education, as character formation is an integral part of students' whole-person development. In this particular module, there was another chapter called "Growing Up", which was taught before "In the Old Days". In it, to promote values education and learn more about the importance of gratitude, the award-winning book *The Giving Tree* was read and discussed with P4 students in the Reading and Writing Booklet. Then, they were taught different ways of expressing gratitude and wrote a thank-you note to a person who helped

them before as they grew up (see Figure 10). To build upon the previous chapter, “Perseverance” was chosen as an additional positive value for “In the Old Days”, with a view to highlighting that people in the old days worked very hard for their lives even when they faced difficulties, as well as to guiding students to reflect on the importance of expressing gratitude and respect towards the older generations and their lives. Apart from making use of e-resources, common English sayings/quotes were introduced and students were invited to design posters featuring the sayings/quotes which they then shared in class and on Padlet (see Figure 11).

The image shows a collage of educational materials for Chapter 3: Growing Up (Gratitude). At the top left, the title "Infusing values education into ELE" is displayed. Below it, the chapter title "Chapter 3: Growing Up (Gratitude)" is highlighted. On the right, the book cover for "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein is shown, with the text "Written & illustrated by Shel Silverstein; Published by HarperCollins".

Key components include:

- Expressions of gratitude:** A list of phrases and examples, such as "use set phrases" (e.g., "Thank you (very much) / (so much)"), "use 'so', 'beyond' and 'very' to describe adjectives", and "use 'thankful' and 'thankful'".
- Thank-you note:** A section with a "Thank-you note" template and a "Reading Corner" section.
- Reading Corner:** A section titled "Now, writing a thank-you note to a person (e.g. a family member or a friend) who helped you before. You can (i) tell him/her one special memory in the past and (ii) express your gratitude for his/her help. You may draw if you want to." Below this is a student's handwritten note to "Dear Sofia" about help with homework.
- Strengthening values education:** A yellow banner at the bottom right.

Figure 10: Value-related Learning Experiences in the Chapter Entitled “Growing Up”

The image shows a collage of educational materials for Chapter 4: In the Old Days (Perseverance and Gratitude). At the top, the chapter title "Chapter 4: In the Old Days (Perseverance and Gratitude)" is highlighted. The main theme is "Infuse the values of not giving up in hard times".

Key components include:

- Introduction of quotes and books:** A section titled "Introduce quotes and books" with a QR code and a form for "The Thankful Book New/Useful Words".
- Explanation and Sayings:** A section titled "Explanation" and "Sayings" with a list of sayings like "Never give up!", "Dream big, work hard, stay humble!", and "In all things, give thanks.".
- Gratitude and Perseverance:** Two student-made posters. One says "GRATITUDE is the BEST ATTITUDE" and "In all things give thanks". The other says "IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW SLOWLY YOU GO SO LONG AS YOU DO NOT STOP" and "Never give up!".
- Students also shared their works on Padlet:** A central text box.
- A new quote from a more able student:** A text box pointing to the "Perseverance" poster.

Figure 11: Value-related Learning Experiences in the Chapter Entitled “In the Old Days”

Promoting learner autonomy and assessment as learning

In order to promote learner independence and autonomy, opportunities were created to empower learners to assume ownership of their learning through the (i) allowing students to set their own missions based on their personal interests and (ii) guiding them to “set goals, monitor, reflect on and evaluate their own learning” (CDC, 2017, p.13) (see Figure 12).

Regarding (i), through enabling tasks and support embedded throughout the reading-to-writing cycle, students were equipped with the necessary knowledge, vocabulary, and syntactical structures for writing up their own time travel journals. Thus, this gradually releases responsibility from teachers to students, thereby helping promote ownership of learning. Teachers were delighted to see different ideas and missions from students: some were interested in exploring about toys children played in the old days, some were eager to find out more about the electronic devices, and some even built upon the outdoor visit to Ping Shan Heritage Trail and would like to write about schools in the old days.

As for (ii) which was a form of “assessment *as* learning”, the conventional KWL chart was modified to include an area on research methods, with a view to inviting students to do their own research and collect information for the writing.

Figure 12: Modified KWL Chart

Glimpses of student learning

Overall, P4 students were sufficiently scaffolded and empowered in this specific reading-to-writing cycle to attempt what might be a rather challenging writing task that demanded them to give expression to research and imagination. They were able to give vivid descriptions, offer enough supporting details, form sensible paragraphs, and write endings with their reflections. For example, a student wrote about toys in the old days and could attain the expected learning outcomes to a satisfactory degree (see Figure 13), with evidence of attitudinal growth because of his engagement in the learning process (see Figure 14). This exemplifies the potential of creating appropriately challenging learning tasks in stretching the abilities of KS2 students, which leads to optimal performance (see also CDC, 2022).

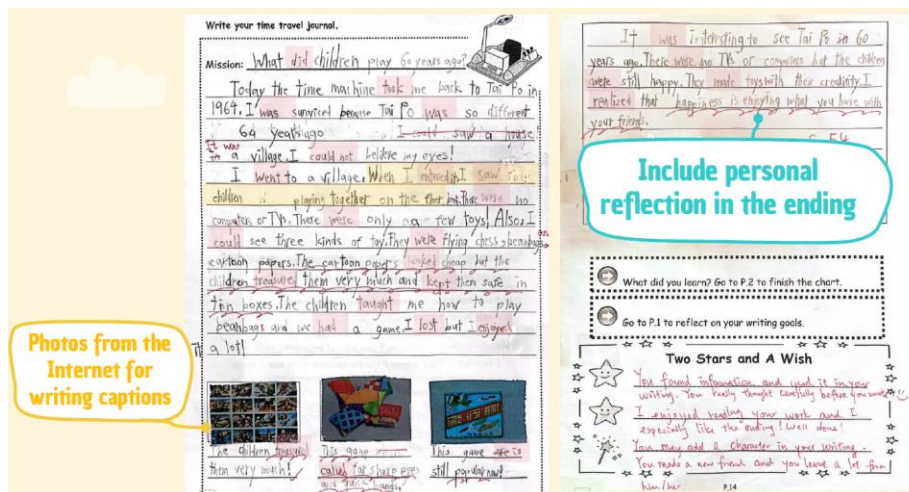


Figure 13: A Student's Time Travel Journal

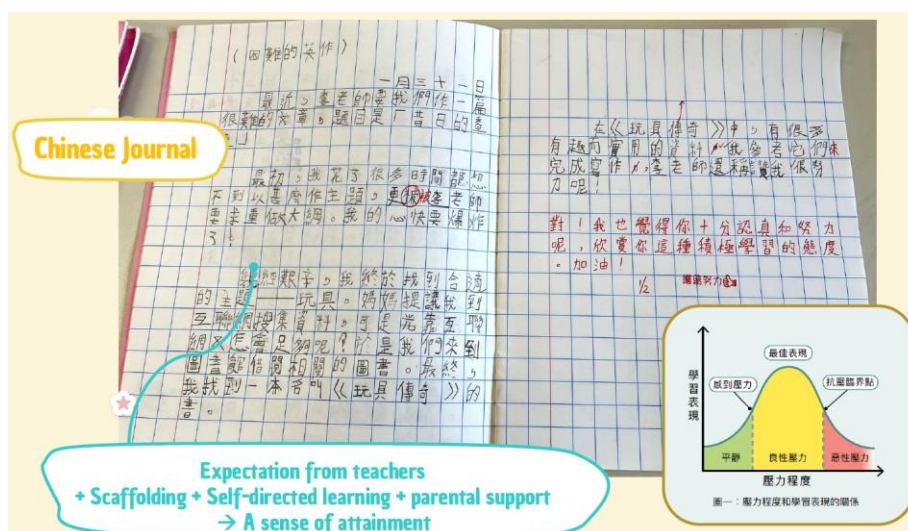


Figure 14: Evidence of Attitudinal Growth

Concluding Thoughts and Way Forward

In summary, the present collaboration between the School and the School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section in optimising reading-to-writing cycles has yielded a promising line of efforts to build upon the accomplishments achieved and further strengthen various aspects of student learning. Notably, it has been most pleasing to enhance teachers' abilities to effectively select, integrate, and adapt various types of language learning resources to bear on the optimisation of reading-to-writing cycles in selected year levels. Through these concerted efforts over these two school years, students have been supported and over time become empowered to actively engage with and apply knowledge, skills, and values in ELE in a purposeful and meaningful fashion.

Moving forward, the English Language panel plans to sustain the outcomes of good practices adopted in P3 and P4, and spread good practices to other learning levels in an incremental manner. As a learning community, curriculum leaders and English teachers of Sung Tak Wong Kin Sheung Memorial School will continue to reflect on their pedagogical practices and room for further refinement, develop and implement coordinated strategies to respond to the ongoing renewal of the ELE curriculum in a progressive and sustainable manner, and strive towards further professional growth and student learning.

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