



▲Left to right: Ms TANG Wan-ki, Ms LAU Lai-ching, Ms HO Wai-ping, Ms TANG Sau-king

Teachers work magic on students' confidence

Teaching Philosophy

Self-motivation is the key to success. By equipping students with the skills to become independent and self-motivated writers, the teachers boost their confidence and develop them into lifelong learners.

Teachers presented with the Award

Ms TANG Sau-king Ms LAU Lai-ching
Ms TANG Wan-ki Ms HO Wai-ping

School

Fung Kai Innovative School

Subjects taught

English Language (P1-6)



Interview with the Teachers

The classroom was filled with enthusiastic students, eagerly reading poems off their tablets. Travel back to the same classroom just three years ago and you would come across a very different scene. With half of the students coming from across the border, Ms Tang Sau-king, the English Panel of the school, described how most students came in with a very limited knowledge of English. "Some are still figuring out the ABCs." To make the situation worse, many were quite reluctant to learn a new language. A P1 student once told Ms Tang, "Why should I learn English? I don't use English at all. I don't think I need to learn English." Facing students with the lack of a basic knowledge in English, together with a difficult attitude, Ms Tang and three other English teachers at Fung Kai Innovative School knew they needed to develop students' capabilities, nurture their interest and change their attitude in learning English.

Behind the "magic"

To some, changes might be daunting but the school has been well known for shaking things up. The school first introduced e-learning ever since its establishment, and three years ago, the team decided to try something different. They introduced the Self-Determination Theory into their English curriculum. "We want students to become lifelong learners. We want them to be learning by themselves not because they have to, but they want to,"



▲ Teachers design the 'Me' series for the writing curriculum

► Students are immersed in virtual reality learning in an English lesson



▲ Students do pair reading enthusiastically during class

said Ms Tang. The team began to build students' self-confidence through the writing curriculum, starting by dropping parallel writing and replacing it by free writing with carefully scaffolded mind-mapping and writing frames. Students will first write about themselves and slowly move on to their school bags, classrooms, pets, families and other authentic topics. Also, they have incorporated interactive activities like encouraging students to design questionnaires in order to learn the "secrets" about their teachers. "With these fun elements, we try to make learning useful and relevant to students' life so they are more interested and more willing to try," said Ms Tang.

The four of them took a leap of faith and, slowly, what they call "the magic" happened. P1 students were able to write two to three paragraphs at the close of the school year. Not only did they see a quick boost of academic performance, but they also noticed students embracing a positive state of mind throughout the process. "There was a student who was very shy but very passionate about computer programming; I reached out and asked if he and three other classmates could help design a virtual reality game for our English lesson. He did it. He was very proud





▲ A teacher shares her "secrets" with students in the teacher interview

► A student is given the chance to become a "little teacher"



when all four other classes played his game excitedly in the lessons. He took this event as his most unforgettable experience of the year," recalled Ms Lau Lai-ching. It is the transformation of students that motivates the team to continue pursuing for excellence. Even though some students might not be the able ones in the English class, the team applauds and celebrates the smallest successful step these students have taken.

From dismissing to believing

Being the leader introducing an innovative teaching strategy could easily become a teacher's nightmare. Ms Ho Wai-ping was the one in the team who resisted the change at the beginning. She recalled, "I simply rejected the strategy because I had no confidence. I didn't believe students could do it. I would give a blunt reply like, 'Don't do this one', 'Maybe next time' when colleagues introduced even the most entertaining language game." Ms Lau, her partner at the time, understood that she was dragging Ms

Ho out of the comfort zone. But she offered to pair up with her to teach the same class and do reviews after lessons. "We took small steps and adjusted things to make the pilot lessons easier and more interesting," said Ms Lau. It took almost a year before Ms Ho eventually turned around and saw the "magic" herself. "At first the students remained quiet when they had to do the speaking exercise. But quite a number of them are now ready and willing to try," she explained.

From being skeptical to becoming one of the leaders today, Ms Ho has found greater confidence in the strategy. "Actually students give me confidence to try more new things and they make me believe that they can do it. Seeing the good progress in students sustains our drive to go for more," she added.

The best reward

Looking back, if the team had the chance to choose again what curriculum innovations they would introduce into their English curriculum three years ago, they would still opt for the Independent Writer Project and exert their best efforts boosting students' intrinsic motivation through writing. "It's worth all the efforts when they can write independently and skilfully," Ms Tang Wan-ki said eagerly with twinkle in her eyes. Ms Ho agreed, "We are not enjoying the outcomes from students' private tutors or parents' coaching, since most students do not have such opportunities. As teachers, we teach whoever comes to our class. Their improvement always gives us fresh impetus to strive for better achievements," Ms Ho said with the warmest smile on her face. "Somehow it's like magic. I couldn't believe I did it. As a teacher I am still learning, just like my students."



▲ Attending to students one by one during reading practice



Teachers' Sharing

Intrinsic motivation is the magic key to success

We are passionate and conscientious professionals who have a shared vision to help our students become lifelong independent learners by promoting their intrinsic motivation. We believe that learning happens more naturally when there are interests and enjoyment. To achieve such goal, we have formulated a comprehensive, diversified and balanced school-based English curriculum including an e-curriculum, a reading and phonics curriculum and the "Independent Writer Project". By making reference to the concepts of "competence, autonomy and relatedness" in the Self-Determination Theory, we reviewed, revised and re-organised our e-textbook materials and task-based learning activities and embedded reading and writing components into the English e-curriculum to match the abilities of our students and characteristics of our school. We aim to enhance students' writing competence and develop them into independent and self-motivated writers.

Developing independent and self-motivated writers

Our objective is to promote students' intrinsic motivation in learning English through developing their writing competence. We aim at shaping them into independent and confident writers capable of reaching their full potential. We continue to develop students' writing competence through cyclic learning in a safe learning environment. Through using mind maps and authentic, student-centred writing topics, students are trained to compose their own writing frames for some real-life topics like "Me". "Me" is explicitly recycled and linked to the new



▲ Peer assessment is a key element in the writing process

topics in the mind maps, making new topics an extension of familiar ideas. During writing, we encourage ownership in the writing tasks through giving students with different learning abilities the autonomy to choose their audience and also what to write. We help them use the learnt vocabulary and structures to express ideas in the writing frames. We carefully walk students through the process of writing.

When students are aware that their writing will be shared with an audience other than the teacher, the sense of relatedness is enhanced and they have a purpose to create work which will earn recognition and receive responses from peers of varying abilities on the e-platform, class bulletin board and school magazines. It is encouraging to see that success in writing further enhances their motivation to write with confidence.

We provide students with diverse student-centred activities and adequate guidance in such a way that they develop the language skills subconsciously through completing the learning tasks. For example, P4 students are assigned to write about their favourite teachers in groups. They have to design a questionnaire, interview the teachers and write the report. The tasks are intended to equip them with the competence to conduct an interview in English. Interviewing tourists is conducted when students join the Sai Kung and Stanley excursions in P5.

The cycle of learning does not stop there. Students are required to write individually about their favourite teachers in P6. They are given the autonomy to choose



▲ A young student learns to create a writing frame for "Me and the park"



▲ Students are having authentic experiences in interviewing overseas visitors



which teacher to interview, what questions to ask, how to present their interview report, etc. They need to design pre-writing tasks which require doing web search for information about questionnaire design, and making decision on what presentation format to use for their report. Students are thrilled to know more about their teachers whilst applying their knowledge and skills.

Students' writing has shown improvement in terms of quality as well as quantity. Their pre-test and post-test performance of the same writing topic has clearly indicated students' improvement in writing. End of term reflections by students also indicate positive attitude and affections towards learning English. Students' work, despite their variations in writing abilities, has become increasingly refined in quality.

Motivating students through games and fun activities

Writing does not occur in a vacuum. Our writing curriculum is embedded in the e-curriculum to provide prerequisite reading and language input. To make learning English fun and enjoyable to students, we introduce interesting games and activities into our lessons. Each lesson from P1 to P6 is made up of carefully and thoughtfully designed tasks to strengthen students' language skills through cyclical learning with fun and laughter. These games and fun activities bring rich and meaningful contexts into the e-curriculum. In one learning unit last year, students were easily motivated by comparing old games and virtual reality games developed by students. They had the opportunity to try playing the games in game booths erected in the school hall. They introduced to interested players the rules and regulations of the gaming activities in English. Students reflected that they learnt English in "real-life experience". Games and fun activities add spices to lessons. These activities,



▲ Students are enjoying playing an old school game, the "Hong Kong Jacks"

► English teachers plan and review each learning module through regular professional sharing



▲ Coaching students to address learner diversity in group work

together with other appealing activities like drama, musicals, animation films appreciation, Fung Kai's Got Talent, etc., enhance students' motivation in the learning process. Knowledge and skills acquired in the General English lessons are applied and consolidated in their writing. We provide opportunities for students to share their work orally in the class or on the e-learning platform. They appreciate and critique others' writing and oral presentations. The sharing facilitates peer assessment and cooperative learning.

Embracing collegiality in professionalism

We have a very strong tradition in curriculum innovations through team work. We support colleagues who are new to the initiative. We learn together with seed teachers through collaborative planning, brainstorming, constant sharing and reflections on the effectiveness of the programme. Nurturing our students into lifelong independent learners is the greatest intrinsic motivation to all English teachers. We own the changes and feel proud of the success in the Independent Writer Project and students' achievements in writing. For us, teaching is a learning journey; it always goes on.





Assessment Summary

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Developing self-motivated and confident writers through the "Independent Writer Project"

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The awardees are a team of dedicated and conscientious English language teachers well-versed in e-learning and curriculum development. They adopt student-centred learning and refer to the theoretical underpinnings of "competence, autonomy and psychological relatedness" in the Self-Determination Theory when developing their "Independent Writer Project". They embed the reading and writing components into the General English curriculum to match the abilities of students with the characteristics of the school. The school-based English curriculum aims to develop self-motivated and confident writers.

A wide range of interactive learning and teaching activities are designed to build up students' confidence and develop their writing competence. The teachers generate recurring mind maps and authentic writing topics like "Me" to help students compose their own writing frames. The use of cyclic writing frames helps students with diverse abilities to retrieve, recycle and reinforce their prior language knowledge and skills to become more self-assured writers. Senior students are allowed autonomy to choose the topics or the intended audience for their writing tasks. They are entrusted with the responsibility of self-directed learning and play an active role in the diverse student-centred activities. E-learning resources, e-tools and fun games are used to develop students' capacity in independent learning. Tasks or competitions, such as the P6 inter-class competitions on service learning, are designed to inspire students from diverse backgrounds and abilities to choose their roles in the tasks according to their abilities. The extra-curricular programme, like the "Shakespeare's lessons", is designed to expose the gifted students to Shakespeare's masterpieces and to arouse their interests in writing creatively. The teachers succeed in creating a language rich environment for their students to read extensively and use language meaningfully inside and outside the classroom. Students are provided with ample



▲ Students enjoy doing team work in e-learning tasks

opportunities to develop their language abilities through joining extra-curricular activities such as competitions, dramas, musicals and excursions to foster their love of the English language.

The teachers are role models in enhancing professionalism in English language teaching. They offer training sessions, serve as mentors, conduct lesson studies and do lesson analysis and evaluation collaboratively with the whole English Panel. Through the "5S" (systematic, sharing, seed leadership, sustainability and support) approach, the sense of community of practice among all English teachers is strong. They have created a strong and effective platform for teacher preparation, performance, reflection and sharing. They are keen to keep themselves abreast of the latest trends and development in English Language education and share their insights and experience with teachers of other schools, external institutions and professional learning community through regular "Open Classrooms". They have been taking the initiative to provide the teaching profession with exemplary practices and stimulation on innovative teaching and learning strategies.

Ways to Obtain Information on the Teaching Practice

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