

# St. Clare's Girls' School

Name of Awarded Teacher : Rosita Gatchalian Chow

## Thinking outside the Box

### Introduction

The key to success in the learning of English or any other language lies in motivation and what is a better motivator than fun. When the element of fun is introduced, the whole classroom lightens up and real learning begins. Learning and teaching English can be fun despite what students and teachers claim to be the contrary. This is one of my beliefs and one which I have put into practice in my thirty years of teaching and has been proven to be true and effective.



Within the classroom and beyond, it is essential to be able "to think outside the box", not to allow oneself to be confined to traditional pedagogy, the limits of the four walls of the classroom, the setting and most important of all, the limited confines of a mindset that one has grown accustomed to. Allow plenty of room for innovative, incredible and the most far-fetched ideas. Turn the classroom into a playground, a theatre, a supermarket or whatever your fancy dictates. Let your imagination run wild and learning goes on without anyone but the teacher being aware of it. It is to sugar the pill that makes it palatable.

I have experimented with a variety of ways to achieve the purpose outlined above. Chairs and desks can be rearranged in different ways to become stalls in a market, the lanes in a supermarket, a maze for the practice of giving and following directions or even pushed to the sides lining the walls to allow ample room for free physical movement or sitting on the floor. Windows and walls provide space for putting up signs and words. Even strings attached to the windows and doors can be used to hang them with the simple use of clothes pegs. Mobiles with words and their associations or words frequently spelt wrongly can be hung from the ceiling.

The use of visual aids is definitely the way to focus students' attention. You may not realize that students are already equipped with a rich repertoire of English vocabulary and phrases as they have been learning English since kindergarten. What they lack is the opportunity to recall these. What is also lacking is the practice in order to internalize what is learnt.

Puppets make magical teaching partners and students talking to each other through the mouths of puppets are not only enjoying the practice but also have the illusion that it is the puppets talking and not themselves. In this way, they find it easier to express themselves without any inhibitions. They can be used to broadcast news, tell a story, explain how to cook a dish or make a weather report. There are infinite uses for them. In actual fact, anything you can lay your hands on can become a teaching material. Brochures, promotional leaflets, maps, advertisements and even used toothpaste boxes can be turned into resources for comprehension passages! Toys and props as well as classroom setting can help create the environment that is both fun and very effective to encourage students to participate actively in the learning process. The key is to use a bit of imagination.



Providing authentic experience and situations would convince the students of the usefulness and practical nature of learning to speak and use the language. Daily life provides a rich resource for language learning and practice. I have brought students of every class in the junior forms to a restaurant to practise reading the menu, ordering food and chatting with lunch partners. Of course, this is after having given them a series of lessons on food, how to order dishes and role play in the classroom. They have been taken to the supermarket to find out the



different sections and the names of food. Then, a supermarket was set up in the classroom for practice. On one occasion, I brought students on a tram ride to see the different parts of Hong Kong, take note of their special features, take photos on the way and return to school to report on their findings. Organizing all these activities involve a great deal of preparation. But it is worth spending the time on and can be made into resource packages for future use. I strongly believe that students, when placed in daily life situations, will practise their vocabulary and sentences and acquire greater confidence in using English.

Look around school for any possible locations for English activities. I have converted a storeroom into a video watching room, a veranda outside the chapel at school into a Cafe, where students can have a drink, some cookies and chat away in English. Students of Forms One and Two were assigned to take up the duty of being waitresses in turn. It was also the place for different activities like storytelling, sing-a-long, and games. It was a much frequented place.

The English Society has organized large scale events every two months. To date, events have included Halloween Festival celebrations which featured a fashion show and a haunted house, Christmas and Chinese New Year Fairs, Valentine Day's flowery delivery service, whereby teachers and students were sent roses with an English message attached, Easter Egg Hunt and Hat Parade. For some of the events, admission was based on their participation in other regular events like English speaking week, English room activities and competitions like "Take Five", a simplified version of Scrabble and so on. They will receive the coveted tickets only if they have made effort in the course of the two months.

Exposure to the language and constant contact with it is a great help in learning a language. This is done by using an English Bulletin Board displaying students' work and articles of interest. Idioms and proverbs are posted around school and along the corridors. It was made compulsory to make all announcements in English.

To succeed in creating an English environment, it is necessary to adopt a whole school approach. Teachers of other subjects are invited to participate in English activities by speaking to students in English and handing out stickers to them during the English Speaking Week. They are invited as adjudicators in competitions, to chat with students in the English Cafe and to accompany them to the English "High Tea" after school. The English Society also organizes a "Spelling Bee" competition where teachers of various subjects supply the words that students frequently spell wrongly and these were compiled into spelling lists for students to study before the mid-term and final examinations. Senior form students are invited to be e-pals with junior forms and allow them to write to them regularly. The rule is to use proper English sentences and not e-mail or ICQ language.

Teaching can be very demanding especially with the rapid changes these days but it is definitely very meaningful and rewarding. As a teacher, I have chosen never to be dampened by whatever obstacles that may beset me and to be as enthusiastic as I was the first day I chose teaching as a lifelong commitment.



## Way of Access to Further Information of the above Teaching Practice

Please e-mail to the ATE Secretariat (ate@emb.gov.hk) stating the specific information you would like to obtain.

## Preferred Way of dissemination / collaboration

Please refer to the latest news of sharing activities organized by the ATE Teachers Association.

Website: [www.ate.gov.hk](http://www.ate.gov.hk)

## Contact

ATE Secretariat: [ate@emb.gov.hk](mailto:ate@emb.gov.hk)

### Remarks of the Assessment Panel

Mrs Chow is an expert teacher who demonstrates exemplary practice in all the five domains. She is a living model of teaching excellence. Her rich experience in teaching and departmental management will provide valuable insights to her fellow teaching professionals.

In order to arouse students' interest in learning English, Mrs Chow has built up a bank of very interesting teaching resources, which she readily shares with her colleagues. She has also designed a variety of interesting extra-curricular activities to enhance students' authentic use of English, such as the Idiom Quiz, the English Speaking Week, Halloween Fashion Show, Christmas Hip-hop Bingo, and the Easter Hat Parade. Her mind is constantly filled with innovative ideas to make learning English an enjoyable experience for her students.

Furthermore, Mrs Chow has successfully incorporated the teaching of thinking skills into the Form Six curriculum, demonstrating to her students how to make effective use of concept maps when reading or generating ideas. When teaching junior form students, she does not only rely on textbooks. Instead, she makes use of games and fun activities so that students can learn English enjoyably. Her curriculum is made up of a wide variety of language activities related to students' daily life experience.

