

Yuen Long Public Secondary School

Name of Awarded Teachers : Wong Suet Ming, Lee Ching Ying,
Tang Mei Kwan, Kam Po Shan

Task-based Thematic Approach

Introduction

The Team

The Team consists of four members:

Miss KAM Po Shan (S4A)

Miss LEE Ching Ying (S4C)

Miss TANG Mei Kwan (S4B, S4D)

Miss WONG Suet Ming (S4E)

Target Group of Students:

Secondary 4 (Two Science classes and three Arts classes of varied abilities and learning difficulties. S4E is exceptionally weak in almost all subjects. Extra attention is paid to that class helping them to find interest in learning and directions in their lives. Each teacher also exercises discretion on materials and teaching modes which best cater the needs of their students.)

Setting the Themes

Seeing, in general, the fading enthusiasm of students in the English language and the continuous distraction from the materialistic world, the Team realized that a change or modification in the learning and teaching mode should be made to arouse students' interest, uncover students' potentials in the subject, inspire students to appreciate the beauty of the language and attain proficiency. The Team sat together before the term to discuss the various 'possibilities' - efficient, creative and novel approaches, which it might employ to avert the downward trend - plummeting results, dropping motivation, losing interest and lack of confidence in the language. Finally the Team resolved that 'Thematic Approach' might be worth trying out to attain the desired learning outcomes.

The Team then identified themes the 15+ groups would be interested in. Four themes were initiated, namely, Teenage Idols, Mass Media, Love and Relationships, and Healthy Lifestyle. The first tried out theme was "Teenage Idols" which the Team believed students of that age group would be attracted to.

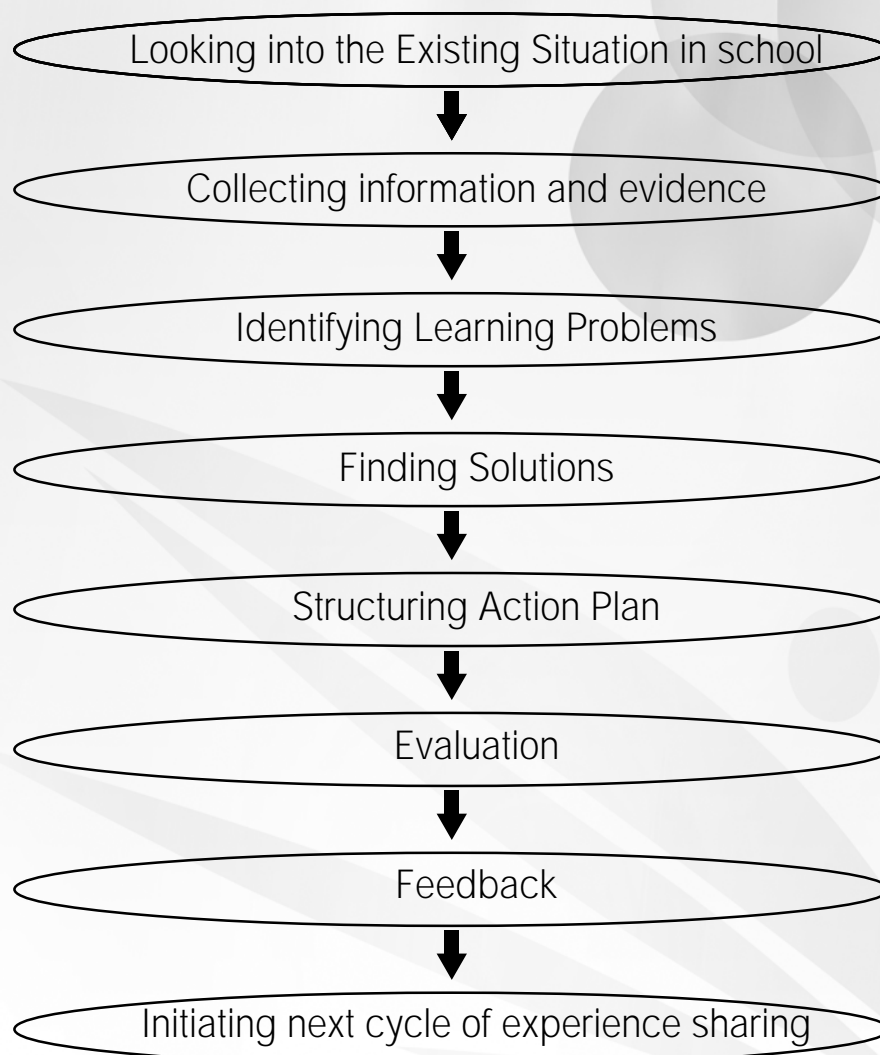
Thematic Approach may not be a new idea in teaching but in our school, the attempt of the Team to adopt it as a learning and teaching strategy is definitely first of its kind.

Organization and planning of Teaching Work

The Team's preparation started with brainstorming the various areas they would like to look into related to the chosen 'theme' - Teenage Idols, and then designed the teaching activities. Teaching strategies were tailor-made to the relevant target group of students and curriculum. When planning the lessons, the four skills were taken into consideration. The Team made sure the generic skills were integrated into the various learning tasks. Work was distributed among team-mates such as setting worksheets, making word cards, searching information on the Internet, finding appropriate passages and practice papers, drafting instruction sheet and designing questionnaire.



Flowchart of the Organization and Planning of Work



School-based curriculum and class-based needs

Different students work differently and are endowed with different potentials. It is never an easy task to find one curriculum to suit all. The Education and Manpower Bureau greatly encourages schools to cater for school-based or student-oriented needs by making appropriate adaptation of the curriculum to help students reach the desired learning targets. The Team adhered to this sound principle - designing a learning syllabus for the Secondary 4 students, taking into consideration their interests and abilities. All the tasks planned were within students' capabilities. The worksheets designed were of different levels of difficulty. Students who were more capable are given more challenging tasks and were required to produce higher quality of work. Students who were less capable are given extra help with their work. Such practice would not discourage students from giving up (as most students find English one of the most difficult subjects).

Passages of different level of difficulties were provided to cater for individual class difference. Teachers taking up different classes can exercise discretion to make appropriate adaptation of the materials to help their own class achieve the desired learning outcomes. Grammar items were put into lessons helping students understand the tenses used and the choice of words on describing people. Practice papers were given to help students apply what they have learnt.



Collaboration and sharing of ideas

If you question how collaboration was demonstrated among the team members and how much students learnt from such kind of teaching, I can tell you that we did make an effort in this area. Brainstorming sessions and lesson planning meetings were held regularly. These meetings were always held after school. The four members sat together discussing the teaching steps and designing the teaching activities. Hours and hours of hard work ended up in interesting lessons for the students and realization of the teaching objectives.

Due to the heavy workload - teaching, marking, administrative duties and extra-curricular activities, it is hard for the Team to schedule time for meetings of the four. The Team set up an e-group (www.groups.yahoo.com/group/ta_tba_ylpps) in Yahoo.com to foster better communication. This is proved to be one of the best means of communication. The e-group also demonstrates true collaborative work. Members would post their work there for scrutiny and comments. New teaching ideas and activities could also be shared there.

Conclusion

No matter how well-planned a lesson is, if it cannot arouse students' interest, it will not yield harvest. The Team, when planning the lessons, always bear in mind the students' interest. Thus, the learning and teaching activities we plan are especially for our students. Students are attracted to them and enjoy working with the teachers. The Team believes that once students' interest is aroused, they will love the language and make great improvement in it.

It is still too early to conclude that this Approach is the best for our students. However, the Team has confidence that it can definitely change some of the students' mind that English is a boring and difficult subject.

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

Contact

ATE Secretariat: ate@emb.gov.hk

Remarks of the Assessment Panel

The group shows a strong commitment to quality. This is borne out in the level of details and depth of their collective lesson planning. It was such depth of lesson planning that accounted for the rich variety of innovative activities generated to enhance students' learning. There were always new elements in their teaching. Such an approach of lesson preparation and planning not only facilitated the professional development of the teachers but also gave students the opportunities to experiment with different learning strategies.

The group brought in the first ever Thematic Teaching Approach to the school. The curricular initiative evidences the group's clarity of purpose, unified and collaborative effort and a clear understanding of their students' learning needs, interests and abilities. The themes chosen were all based on students' experiences and interests. Teaching materials that improve practice on the four language skills as well as generic skills and information technology skills, were specially designed and tailor-made for the students, with worksheets graded for different levels of difficulty.

