



From left to right: Ms LAW Suk-yin, Mr LAM Cheuk-lun, Aaron, Ms Valerie PRITCHARD and Ms LAU Kam-ying

Learning together through Cooperative Learning

Recipients of the Certificate of Merit

Mr LAM Cheuk-lun, Aaron (Years of teaching: 15 years)
Ms LAW Suk-yin (Years of teaching: 29 years)
Ms LAU Kam-ying (Years of teaching: 7 years)
Ms Valerie PRITCHARD (Years of teaching: 19 years)

School

Concordia Lutheran School
- North Point

Teaching Levels

Secondary 1 - 6
(English Language)

Teaching Beliefs

“Students, regardless of their abilities, can achieve success if given the right stimulus by the teachers.”

Interview with the Teachers

“Through collaboration, students learn from each other, even the shy ones would contribute to the group work.”

Accompanied by the finger-snaps, claps, and the hearty laughter of the teacher performers and student audience, the school rap of Concordia Lutheran School – North Point (CLSNP) came to its end. Mr LAM, the English Panel Chairperson, says, “Like the students, a number of the subject teachers are reluctant to speak English in front of the public; so if they can do it, why can’t the students? This is the message we want to give.”

Mr LAM Cheuk-lun, Ms LAW Suk-yin, Ms LAU Kam-ying and Ms Valerie PRITCHARD, as a team, strive to build the students’ confidence in using English and help them to reach their full potential, regardless of their diverse abilities.



Ms LAU is guiding students through a guessing game.

The Cooperative Learning Pilot Scheme

The four teachers all agree that students nowadays are highly diversified in their abilities. While some may not be able to follow in class, others may think they already know everything. Under the leadership of Mr LAM, they joined the Cooperative Learning Pilot Scheme, and strategised ways of implementing group work to enhance students’ language and generic skills.

Through collaboration, students could learn from each other; even the shy ones would contribute to the group work, creating a “noisy classroom” just as the team wished. “Weaker students can learn because they feel more at ease in groups,” Ms LAW says. “The stronger students are often asked to be the leaders, and as they try to help others, they find that they do not really know everything and they will go back and learn some more.”

The use of innovative and creative learning materials prepared by Ms LAU, such as catchy drawings, graphic arts and up-to-date news clips, also captures students’ attention and facilitates critical thinking.

A variety of learning activities

Besides adopting cooperative learning, the team also grasps every opportunity to organise activities to help students learn and use English. One of the highlights is the annual all-English musical, which involves all the teaching staff at the school. “English musical is nothing new, but with all the teachers on stage? I think this is the fun part of it,” says Mr LAM.

With the joint effort by all the teachers from every subject and department, the students’ determination to stage a good show, and the professional theatre company hired, it was not surprising that the musical of this year, “Noah’s Ark – God Remembers”, turned out to be a brilliant performance. There were close to a hundred in the cast, mostly Secondary 1 students. “They might not have perfect pronunciation or grammar; but after training, at least their utterances were loud and clear,” says Mr LAM.

Other initiatives taken to enrich the English learning atmosphere include “Learning Diary” which helps students to consolidate what they have learnt and reflect upon it, and “English Pump Up Station” in which Mr LAM and Ms PRITCHARD participate in the activities prepared by different classes, learn English and have fun together with the students under a relaxing atmosphere.

Two years of hard work have greatly enhanced students’ confidence in using English. “We are more prepared for challenges; there is no guarantee that what we do will work, but we are daring enough to try,” say the four enthusiastic teachers as they smile together.



Students are helping each other to learn.



Teachers' Sharing

One times four equals...

We are four experienced teachers of English who are open to new initiatives. We believe that cooperative learning and teaching strategies would help us to cater to learners' different abilities and needs.

The practices

One of the cooperative strategies we have used is grouping students into “expert groups” and “learning groups”. In a reading class, students work in groups and each group reads a different article. Students are all “experts” of the articles they have read intensively. However, when students regroup, they become “learners”, learning about the other articles from the different “experts” in their new group. The following is an example.

Level	Form 4 Intermediate (24 students)
Skills covered	Reading for specific purposes
Number of texts to be covered	3 (can be of the same or different genres) The questions assigned to each group should take similar amount of time regardless of the length of the texts.
Number of Expert groups	6 (4 students each) The same text can be assigned to 2 expert groups.
Expert groups' points to note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups are of mixed abilities. • All expert group members must study the questions, make sure each member understands them, search the answers together, write the line reference (if any) and be prepared to explain to others. • Different expert groups may work at a different pace. More capable students/groups should be asked to write a summary and/or reflection of the text. Less capable students/groups could be given some sample answers for their reference. Alternatively, these students can do pre-reading at home. • Teachers act as facilitator and monitor students' progress. Make sure students work as a group, read aloud the questions and answers and ask the teacher for clarifications.
Learning groups' points to note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once all expert groups have got their answers and explanations, students are reshuffled and 8 learning groups are formed. • Each learning group consists of students from different expert groups reading different texts. • Teachers should remind students that they are now learning from other learners. They must read the articles and questions and discuss the answers. They must not copy each other's answers. The “expert” can give them explanations and the line reference (if any).
Possible problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time. Do allow for 1 lesson for expert group and 1 lesson for learning group. It is impossible for genuine peer learning to take place if both expert group and learning group tasks are done in one single lesson. • Students copying from each other. Teachers can alter the seating arrangements and/or establish house rules to prohibit such behaviour.
Teacher's role	In addition to the role as facilitator, the teacher should spend some time on whole-class teaching either in the form of introductory teaching (lead-in) or feedback (highlighting common mistakes or misunderstanding).

How cooperative learning helps

Cooperative learning allows all students to be more active in their learning. In the learning group, the students who have better English can help explain to others whose English is not as good. In return, these higher ability students can reinforce their own learning. At the same time, the students who need more help with understanding the material are being helped more as they don't have to rely just on the teacher for help. As a result, students with lower English levels can learn more during the lesson. Everyone is involved in the learning process, making the learning environment more lively and empowering.

Assessment Summary

Incorporated cooperative teaching and learning strategies to cater to learners' different abilities and needs, and implemented various initiatives to improve English learning and teaching in the school.

These four experienced teachers of English are enthusiastic and open to new initiatives. They have been trying different approaches in their own classrooms to address the issue of diverse learner abilities. In 2007, they joined the Cooperative Learning Pilot Scheme, hoping that the cooperative teaching and learning strategies would help them cater to learners' different abilities and needs. Although cooperative learning has only been implemented for three years, positive impacts on learning and teaching have been noted. Students are now more active in their learning and teachers are more student-centred.

The teachers believe that teachers should empower students with knowledge and skills so that they can take an active role in learning. They should take the role of a director instead of a knowledge-transmitter and help students to inquire and construct meaning from their learning.

In the lessons observed, the teachers succeeded in getting the senior form students to take an active role in their learning. They stood back and gave students the opportunities to construct knowledge and use English to explain and share their learning with others. In the interview, students told the Assessment Panel that they learnt a lot in the group discussions and sharing sessions. The S6 newcomers from other secondary schools found the English teachers in Concordia Lutheran School very patient and helpful and gave them a lot of opportunities to speak English inside and outside the classroom.



Besides cooperative learning, the teachers have implemented a number of initiatives to improve English learning and teaching in the school, such as staging a large-scale all-English musical involving all teaching and non-teaching staff, implementing a programme called "English Pump Up Station" in which students have to prepare language activities for the English teachers' visit.

The teachers collaborate well as a team, with each member playing a significant role in the cooperative learning scheme. Their classrooms are open to visits by the Principal, English teachers and teachers of other subjects. They are receptive to suggestions and keen to make improvements of their lessons. Their enthusiasm has fostered a culture of sharing among teachers.

Way of Access to Information of the above Teaching Practice

Please refer to contact below

Preferred Way of Dissemination

Sharing sessions and seminars

Contact

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