

Helping Primary Six Students to Prepare for Life in a Secondary School with English as the Medium of Instruction

The Programme

In a secondary school with English as the medium of instruction, a 5-day English Summer Workshop was conducted in July to help about 80 P.6 students to prepare for life in the new academic year.

In the Workshop, the English teachers, supported by Computer teachers & Guidance teachers, and assisted by some Workshop facilitators (S4 & S6 students), conducted the following activities:

- Designing Group Names and Group Slogans in English
- Competing to crack riddles / get jumbled up sentences hidden in balloons
- Show & Tell (done by each student with an object brought from home to introduce himself/herself to the group)
- Watching and listening to storytelling performances designed and delivered by the Big Sisters
- Interactive picture drawing to activate students' vocabulary (all that has been saved in their brain bank dating back to kindergarten time !)
- Reading and following instructions to make mobiles and displayable ornaments to welcome the parents on the last day of the Workshop
- Playing a netball game while practising accurate spelling
- Watching video / film extracts and discussing in groups afterwards
- Singing and dancing to recognise rhymes and accurate spelling
- Writing journal entries to practise self-reflection and expression
- Writing scripts based on given props and preparing a drama performance to learn team work, expressing oneself in an assigned role and using English in a relaxed and fun context

Achievements

At the end of the Summer Workshop, the following outcomes were observed:

1. Students are more prepared to use English as the language for learning and the tool for communication within the school campus.
2. Students have been familiarised with classroom rules / behaviour codes and they have learnt more about the school culture from the Big Sisters and through the Workshop learning experience.
3. Students' confidence and skills in communicating with others, in collaborating with others, in being creative, in note-taking, time-management and in using a computer to learn are boosted and developed through their enthusiastic participation in a variety of activities.

4. Students' feelings and attitudes towards the notions of "*secondary school life*", "*learning English*", "*using English to learn*", "*using English to communicate with others*", "*the freedom of having fun and / or being self-disciplined in a school setting*" and "*having fun while learning*" have changed and / or improved, with their anxieties about joining a new school reduced and some misconceptions about learning clarified.
5. Students meet and are introduced to current, senior students who become both their Big Sisters as well as Little Teachers; cross-level peer relationship building is enhanced which facilitates students' "settling in" with a greater sense of security.

Some Enabling Factors

1. **Inter-departmental collaboration** among teachers on the English panel, Computer panel and Guidance panel contribute to the planning of the Workshop. The English teachers design and deliver the programme by **team-teaching** while the Big Sisters **facilitate student learning** throughout the five days of the Workshop.
2. The duration of **five consecutive days** in the Workshop allows **time** and provides **space** for team building in the learning groups (P.6 students), cross-level peer relationship building (P.6 students and the Big Sisters), and teacher-student relationship building. Students begin to develop a sense of belonging to the "new" school.
3. A variety of **English learning and confidence-boosting activities** are conducted during the Workshop when teachers team-teach and the Big Sisters facilitate students' participation to cater for learner differences. The design and structuring of such activities help to undo certain learning habits developed in, and / or more appropriate to, for learning in primary school settings; their implementation appeals to students with different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Every opportunity is provided for the instant and contextualised application of learning.
4. Post-workshop communication between students and their Big Sisters both during and outside follow-up activities has smoothed the students' adaptation to school life in S1.
5. Immediate and negotiable feedback on learning is also provided in the forms of recording and accumulating the marks attained by the groups for the five days on the Scoring Board. Peer evaluation takes place after each activity (e.g. by show of hands; cheering or booing; waving "fans" on which marks are written). The Big Sisters put stickers, and write personal notes and feedback in students' journal. Parents come in to appreciate the displayable products of learning on the last day of the Workshop.

Some follow-up activities

Extensive reading is a follow-up activity planned and conducted to sustain students' efforts in English learning. Big Sisters guide students to select storybooks appropriate to their ability level at the Book Fair on the last day of the Workshop. After the Workshop, students prepare book reports on cassette tapes to be shared with teachers and fellow classmates during class time. During rest of the school year, students continue to **read to learn and read to share** with Big Sisters outside class time. The Big Sisters recommend "readable" stories to the students, chart and monitor their reading progress, give them guidance on vocabulary wherever necessary and discuss with them the stories they have read, to sustain their motivation in reading (and English learning through reading).