

Catering for Learner Diversity in the Senior Secondary English Classroom

Introduction

This exemplar illustrates effective strategies at the classroom level to address learners' varied abilities, interests and learning styles:

- **varying the choice of input and output** to enhance learners' engagement and motivation
- **varying questions in terms of language and cognitive demands** to cater for different English proficiency levels and cognitive abilities
- **employing flexible grouping strategies** to cater for different learning styles and progress
- **providing timely feedback** to help learners make further improvement

Background

The learning activities were tried out in a co-educational school located in the New Territories with mostly less advanced learners. In general, the learners are cooperative but their English proficiency levels vary considerably. Many of them lack ideas in their writing and are unable to present their ideas in an organised manner.

Planning Stage

Teachers work as a team to:

1. identify a topic which can draw on the learners' prior knowledge and is related to their personal experiences;
2. source and adapt authentic materials in various formats and modes (e.g. pictures, audio recordings and video clips) to help the learners of different learning styles activate their schema and gain a better understanding of the topic;
3. choose texts of different levels of difficulty by examining such factors as abstractness, organisation and information density;
4. design learning activities (e.g. filling out mind maps and tables) which facilitate the learners' understanding of the reading texts, and develop discussion tasks which pose a reasonable challenge to the learners;
5. plan teaching procedures to employ flexible grouping strategies, which build the learners' confidence and sustain their participation and motivation throughout; and
6. develop a core task for all the learners and design two extended activities with a multiple intelligence orientation to enable the learners to capitalise on their strengths and facilitate learner autonomy.

<i>Learning and Teaching Process</i>	<i>Impact on Learning</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher shows the learners a picture of the Olympic bronze medalist Ms Sarah Lee Wai-size and invites them to share what they know about her. • The teacher distributes a fact sheet about Sarah with missing information and plays an audio recording about the athlete. • The learners listen to the recording and fill in the fact sheet. • The learners are led to think about the efforts Sarah made in her childhood, and express ideas on the types of activities parents usually engage their children in in their spare time. • The teacher plays a video clip about how a strict mother develops her daughter’s passion for piano. • The teacher leads the learners to discuss the struggle the daughter has faced and relate her experience to their own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The various types of multimodal input (e.g. picture, audio recording and video clip) cater for different learning styles. ➤ The fact sheet introduces to the less advanced learners some basic vocabulary related to the topic and prepares them for the subsequent reading texts and discussion tasks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher puts the learners into two groups according to their reading proficiency and cognitive abilities. • The learners with higher abilities are assigned Roles A & B and the rest Roles C & D. (A: Parents, B: Childhood experts, C: Children, and D: Business leaders) • The learners assuming Roles A & B and Roles C & D are provided with different sets of texts which are related to their respective roles and pitched at their proficiency levels. • The learners taking the same role discuss a topic which consists of a set of prompts requiring various levels of cognitive process. <i>[Refer to Appendix 1 for the discussion prompts of different cognitive demands.]</i> • During the discussion, the learners are given a graphic organiser to jot down their ideas. <i>[Refer to Appendix 2 for the graphic organisers used in the discussion which involves learners taking the same role.]</i> • The teacher provides language support for the groups of less advanced learners and poses challenging questions to the groups of more advanced learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The use of different sets of texts, which incorporate different modes of representation (e.g. feature article, script and chart) and vary in the level of complexity, helps learners of different learning styles and proficiency levels develop reading skills progressively. ➤ With homogeneous grouping arrangements, the learners build confidence and become more engaged through interacting with others of similar proficiency level. Such arrangements also prepare the learners well for the upcoming discussion so that the less advanced learners feel less intimidated when interacting with their more advanced counterparts. ➤ Discussion prompts of various levels of cognitive demand reasonably challenge different learners. ➤ The timely feedback provided by the teacher in the form of language support or challenging questions helps the learners of different stages of progress improve further. ➤ The graphic organisers provide the necessary scaffolds for the less advanced learners to organise their ideas.

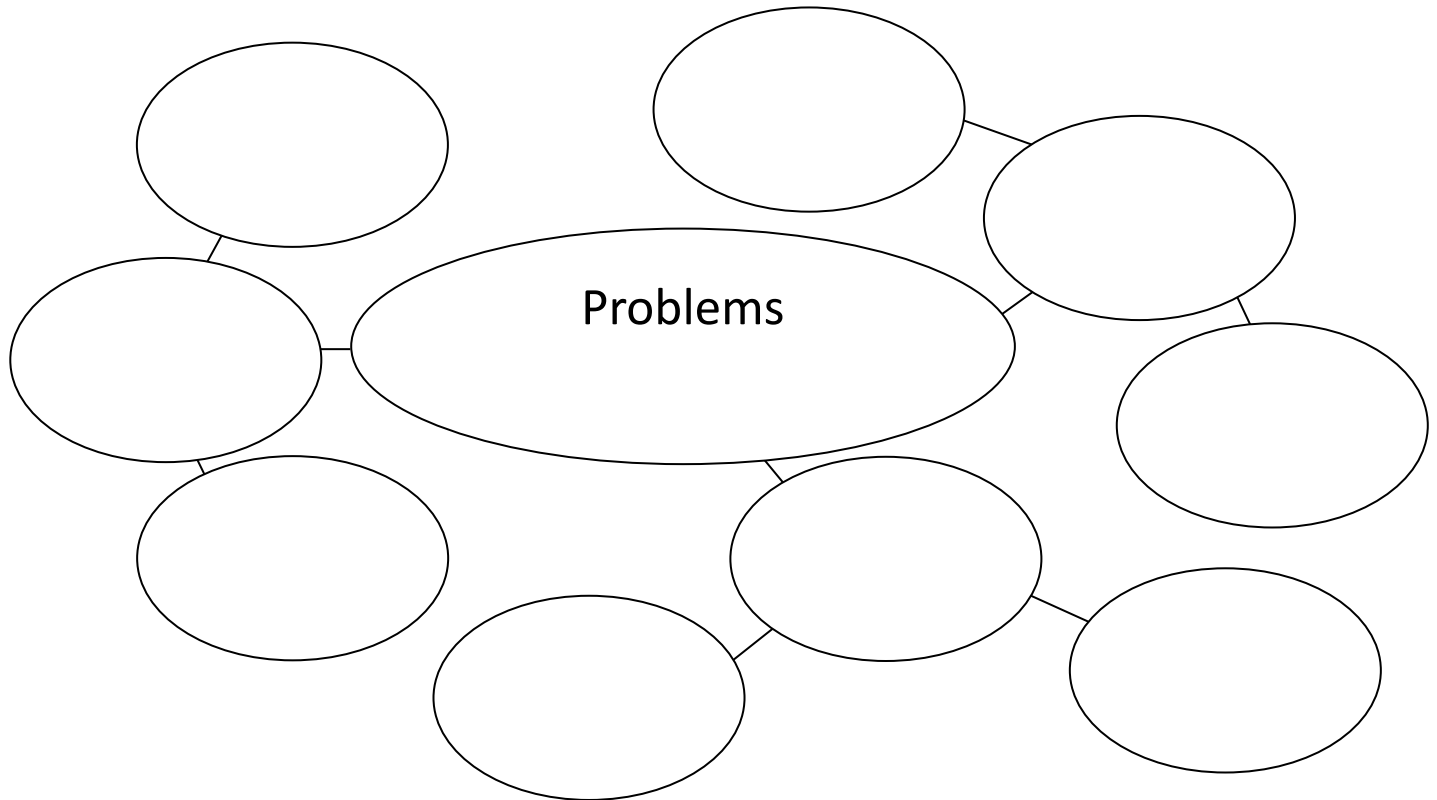
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learners assuming different roles form groups of four. • Building on the ideas in the previous discussion, the learners exchange ideas on the topic: “<i>Should parents arrange a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children?</i>” • The learners jot down in another graphic organiser [<i>Refer to Appendix 3 for the graphic organiser used in the discussion which involves learners taking different roles.</i>] the views of other members in the group discussion for consolidation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Heterogeneous grouping arrangements enable the learners of various levels of language proficiency to develop confidence and play a more active role in the discussion by contributing ideas peculiar to their role, which facilitates peer learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While some learners are invited to present their views openly to the whole class, the rest take notes and address questions to the presenters. • The teacher provides feedback by clarifying the learners’ misconceptions, and modelling the correct use of language through rephrasing their views. The teacher then summarises the learners’ views on the blackboard in the form of a graphic organiser. • The learners are required to produce an argumentative essay on the topic as the core task, and display their reflections on the learning experiences in the form of either a proposal or a poster. [<i>Refer to Appendix 4 for a sample of the proposal and the poster produced by the learners of different learning styles.</i>] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The timely feedback provided by the teacher helps the learners improve further. ➤ The varied choice of output not only promotes learner autonomy, but also draws on the learners’ strengths and further stretches their potential.

*The reading texts adopted in this exemplar are adapted from the following articles:

- ‘Push to the limit’ by Elaine Yau, SCMP, 23 Oct 2006
- ‘Hard knocks’ by Elaine Yau, SCMP, 14 Oct 2012
- ‘Children of working mums at risk’ by Patsy Moy, SCMP, 29 May 2006
- ‘Younger generation lacking key leadership skills, survey reveals’ by Dennis Eng, SCMP, 4 Jun 2007
- ‘In difficult times, passion pays’ by Tom Eves, SCMP, 27 Oct 2012
- ‘HK’s one-child problem’, Editorial, SCMP, 10 Apr 2012
- ‘Dadzilla and Monster Mum’, Family Post, SCMP, 6 Nov 2011
- ‘Ice guys strive to finish first’, by Elaine Yau, 26 Feb 2012

Teachers may refer to the above copyrighted materials online.

What are the problems with parents trying to arrange extra-curricular activities for their children, regardless of their genuine interest and aptitude? Organise your ideas in the following mind map.



Set A Discussion Topic

A childhood expert

Owing to the increasingly intense competition in Hong Kong, many parents make determined attempts to improve their children’s competitive edge by not only pushing them academically but also making them participate in various extra-curricular activities. While some people believe that these activities are conducive to children’s all-round development which is the ticket to success in life, others raise concern over the healthy growth of children and the value of a carefree childhood. **As a childhood expert**, discuss with your peers whether it is appropriate for parents to arrange a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children.

You may wish to discuss:

- whether children in Hong Kong are allowed to pursue their interests in their spare time
- problems with parents trying to fill their children’s schedule with extra-curricular activities, regardless of their genuine interest and aptitude
- the essential elements of a healthy childhood
- anything else you think is important

Complete the following table with the information from the texts and your own opinions.

Parents' views on engaging children in after-school activities

Working Parents	Demanding Parents	Easy-going Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ●

Set A Discussion Topic

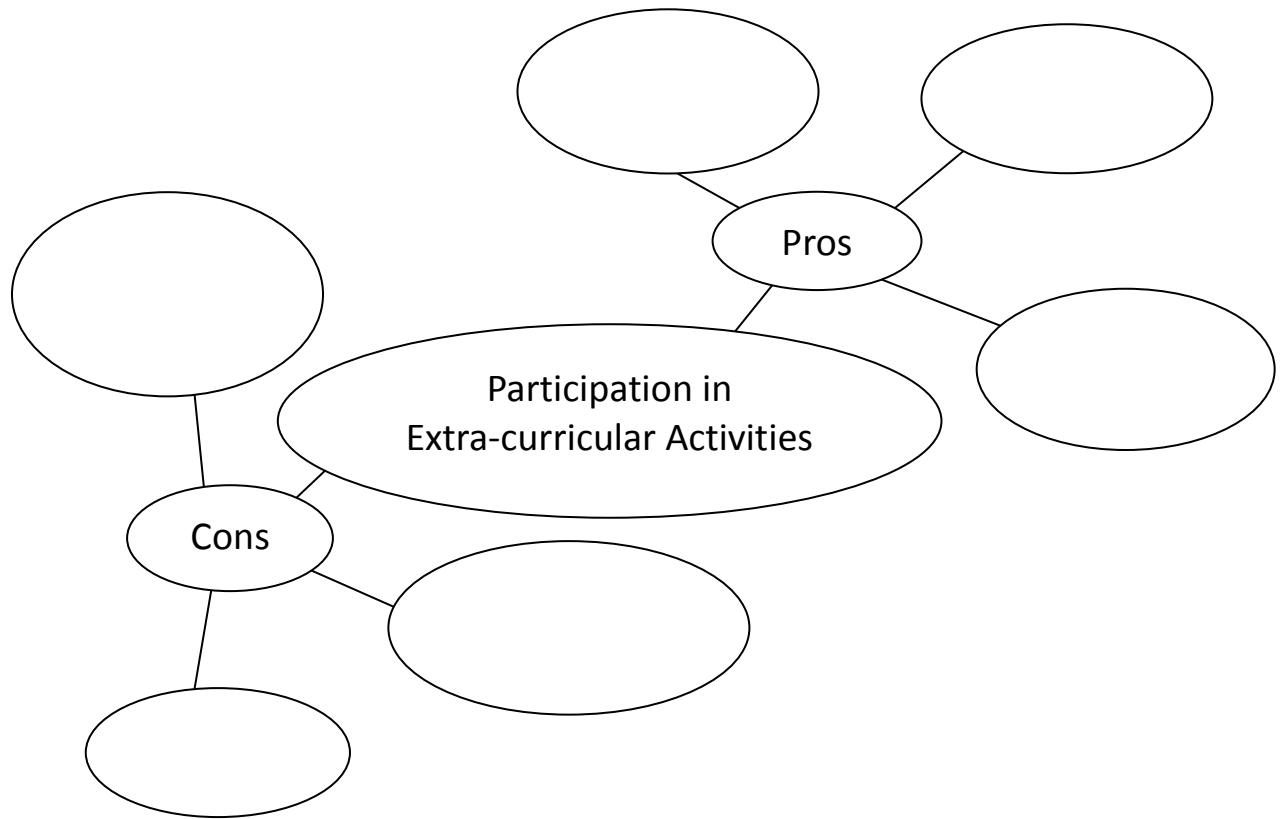
A parent

Owing to the increasingly intense competition in Hong Kong, many parents make determined attempts to improve their children's competitive edge by not only pushing them academically but also filling their after-school schedules with various extra-curricular activities. While some people believe that these activities are conducive to children's all-round development which is the ticket to success in life, others raise concern over the healthy growth of children and the value of a carefree childhood. **As a parent**, discuss with your peers whether it is appropriate to arrange a wide range of after-school classes or activities for your children.

You may wish to discuss:

- whether achievements in extra-curricular activities and good examination results are essential for success
- why working parents might want to engage their children in after-school activities
- the pros and cons of parents interfering in every aspect of children's after-school schedule and pushing them into excellence
- anything else you think is important

Fill in the following mind map with the information from the texts and your own opinions.



Set B Discussion Topic

A young child

Owing to the increasingly intense competition in Hong Kong, many parents make determined attempts to improve their children's competitive edge by not only pushing them academically but also filling their after-school schedules with various extra-curricular activities. While some people believe that these activities are conducive to children's all-round development which is the ticket to success in life, others raise concern over the healthy growth of children and the value of a carefree childhood. **As a young child**, discuss with your peers whether it is appropriate for parents to arrange a wide range of after-school classes or activities for you.

You may wish to discuss:

- the pros of taking part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities
- the cons of taking part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities
- the balance between the quality and quantity of extra-curricular activities
- anything else that you think is important

Fill in the following tables with the figures from the text and the chart.

The qualities in which the younger generation are lacking in	Percentage
Sense of independence	
	48%
	47%
Right knowledge and skills	

The top five areas where businessmen are not confident that HK's university graduates possess sufficient and relevant skills for meeting the needs of society:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Set B Discussion Topic

A business leader

Owing to the increasingly intense competition in Hong Kong, many parents make determined attempts to improve their children's competitive edge by not only pushing them academically but also filling their after-school schedules with various extra-curricular activities. While some people believe that these activities are conducive to children's all-round development which is the ticket to success in life, others raise concern over the healthy growth of children and the value of a carefree childhood. **As a business leader**, discuss with your peers whether it is appropriate for parents to arrange a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children.

You may wish to discuss:

- the qualities in which local students are lacking
- whether participating in extra-curricular activities can equip children with these qualities
- whether academic qualifications are more important than non-academic achievements in the workplace
- anything else that you think is important

Present ideas in support of / against parents' arranging a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children from the perspective of **a childhood expert** with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and **your own knowledge** as appropriate.

Should parents arrange a wide range of after-school activities for their children?

E.g.
The possible problems of children not taking part in any after-school activities:

Present ideas in support of / against parents' arranging a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children from the perspective of **a parent** with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and **your own knowledge** as appropriate.

Should parents arrange a wide range of after-school activities for their children?

E.g. The consideration of a working parent:	
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Present ideas in support of / against parents' arranging a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children from the perspective of **a young child** with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and **your own knowledge** as appropriate.

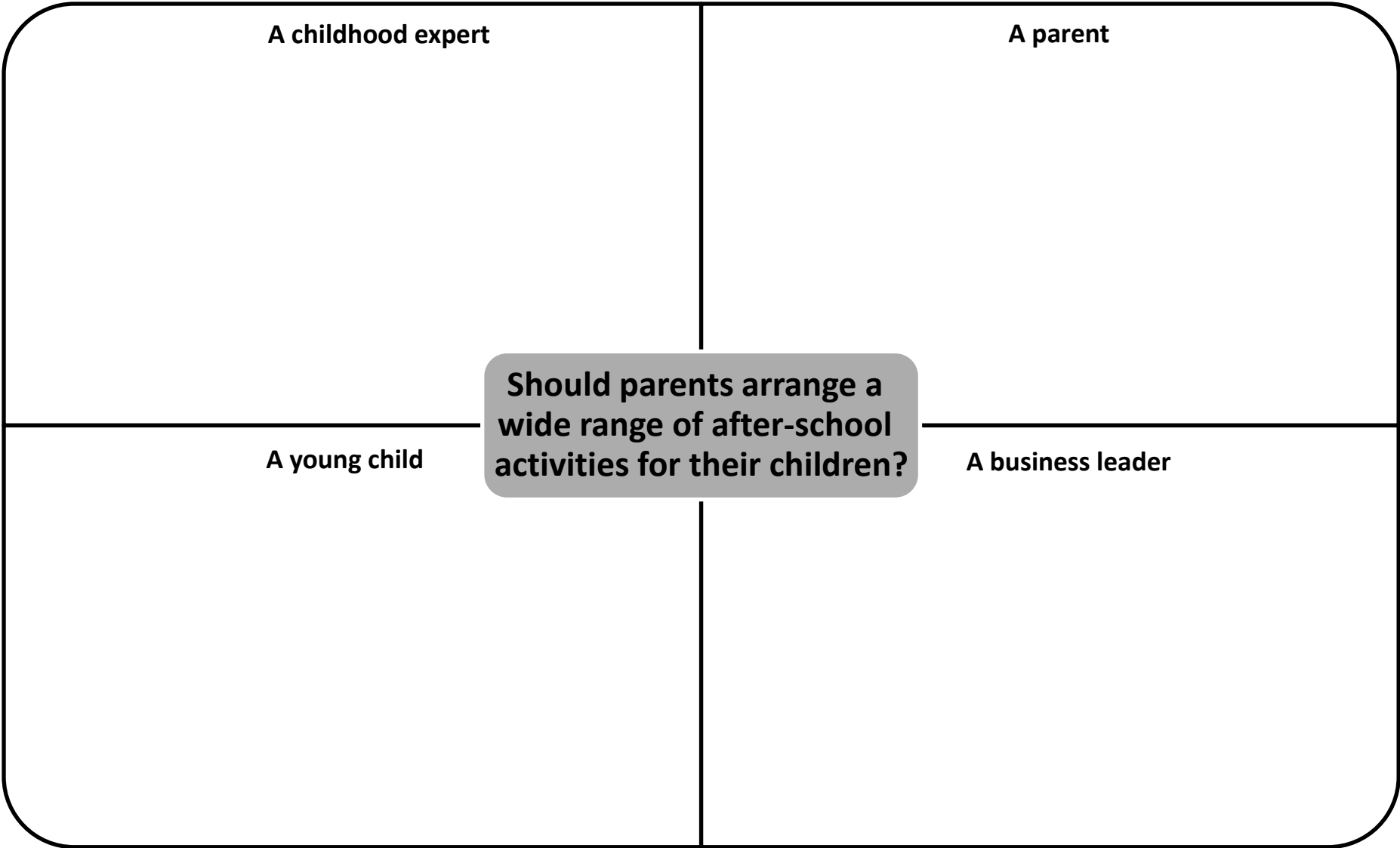
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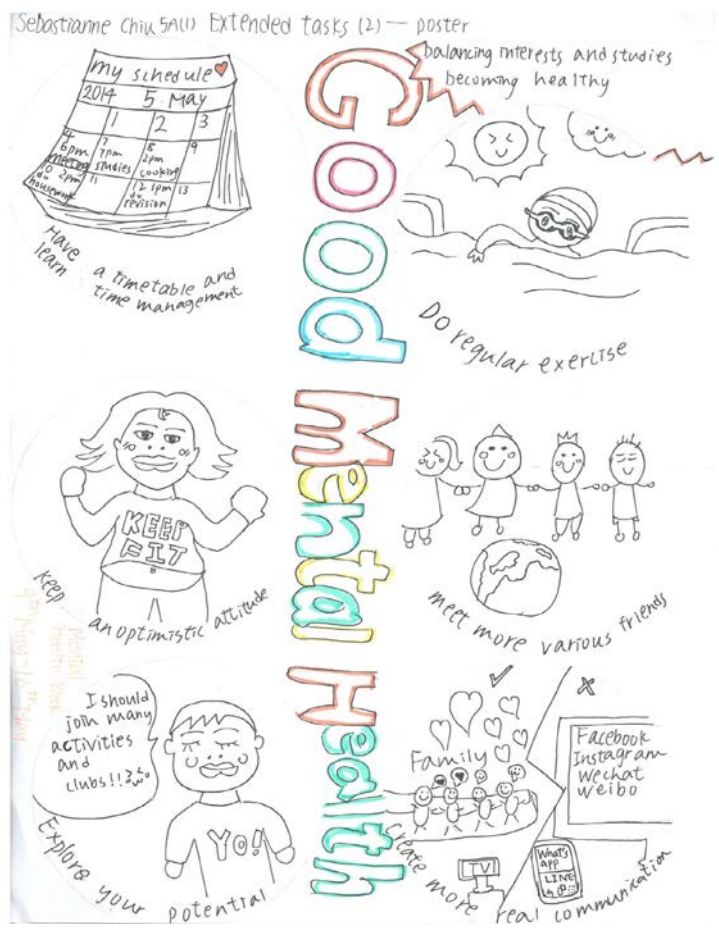
E.g.
Being too young / immature to plan ahead for the future

Present ideas in support of / against parents' arranging a wide range of after-school classes or activities for their children from the perspective of **a business leader** with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and **your own knowledge** as appropriate.

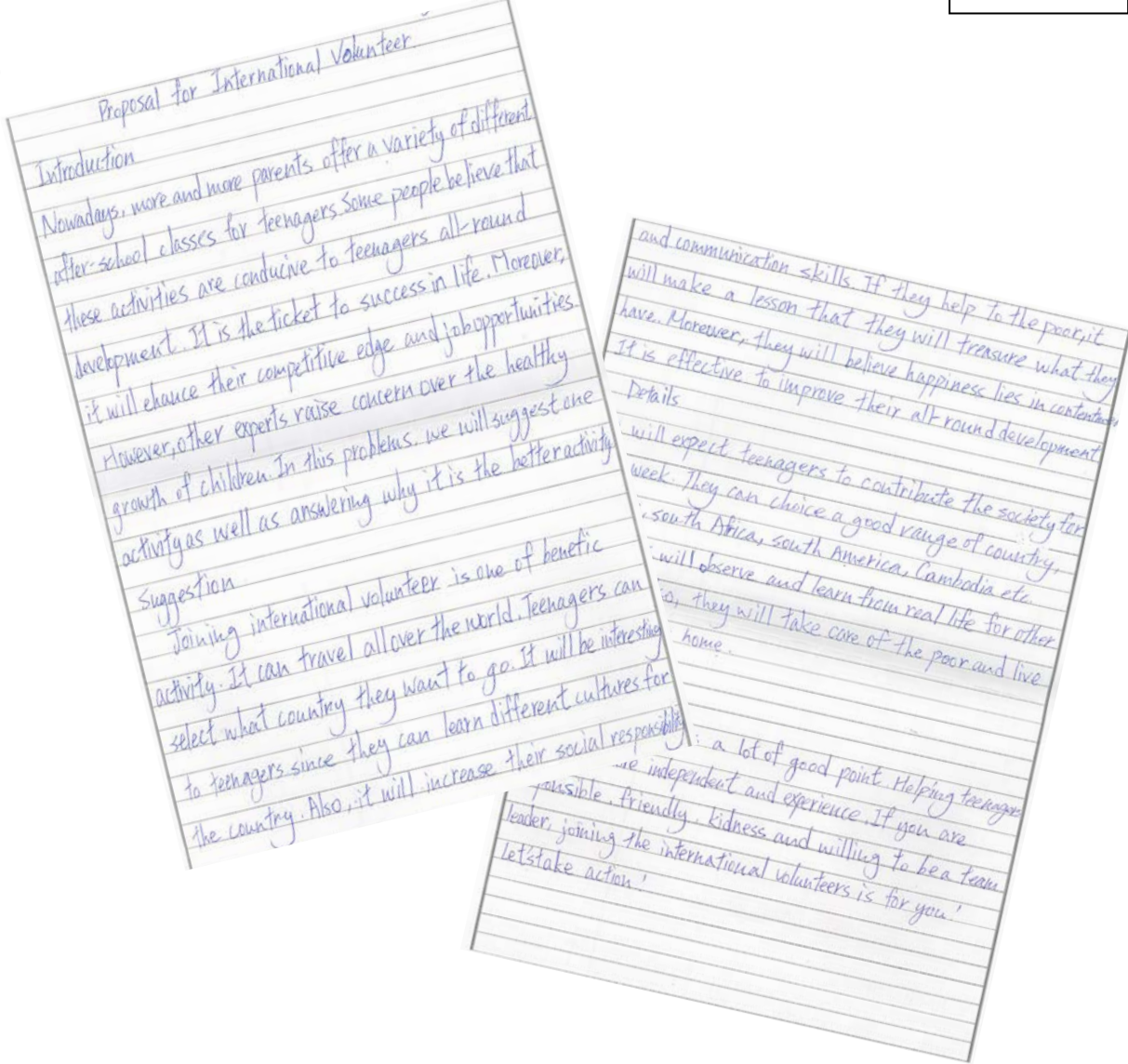
Should parents arrange a wide range of after-school activities for their children?

E.g.
The essential qualities in the workplace





Extended activity - Poster



Extended activity - Proposal