Exemplar 11: A Whole-school Approach

The impressive improvements in public examination results at [Yuen Long Lutheran Secondary School](#) can be traced to their whole-school approach to English and the coordination of various factors. These factors may be grouped into the areas of *policies, culture and teaching*.

POLICIES

The principal's vision of a whole-school approach to English was identified as distinctive, as was **her ability to persuade colleagues to accept her policies**. Once English was identified as a limiting factor for the students' further education at University, it became a priority of the whole school, not just the English panel.

The effective deployment of human resources is another distinctive feature of YLLSS. Examples include:

- The **vice-principal as a mediator** between the English panel and the administration, and
- The **redeployment of the NET** from teaching regular classes to focusing solely on oral classes and running English activities. This has led to an improvement in English oral results and an increase in the quantity and quality of English activities for the whole student body.

Effective structures that enhance support and collaboration in YLLSS are also worthy of study. These include:

- **The Support Group**, which assists the panel chair in her decision-making and workload,
- **The Mentoring Programme**, which allows new colleagues to learn from their more experienced colleagues, and
- **The Collective Lesson-Planning meetings (CLP)** , which allow teachers to share new teaching ideas, critique the textbook and evaluate their progress as a Form. Their reflection is assisted by the existence of a research team, which helps to analyse all test and examination results in order to provide the English panel with feedback on teaching and learning. This feedback is then translated into revised teaching strategies at the classroom level.

CULTURE

The emergence of an English "culture" at YLLSS is apparent through the students' motivation to use English outside class and their enthusiastic participation in the various English activities run by the English Club. The English Club, which has played a significant part in building the English culture at the school, has grown from 50 members to over 300 members in just four years.

The success of these initiatives and activities can be traced to a number of underlying values, such as:

- **The emphasis on reward rather than punishment**, which helps to generate student interest in English and build their confidence, and
- **The degree of role-modelling** that occurs in activities and within the English Club structure.

Other non-English subject teachers are also involved in English activities, such as the English Speaking Day. Teachers are eager to help students, and also to develop themselves, as shown by the initiative of the science and mathematics teachers to ask the NET teacher to help them improve their English through after-school workshops.

TEACHING

The commitment of the English panel both complements and is supported by the school culture and administrative policies. This commitment is reflected in the public examination results, as well as the student feedback.

To acknowledge the consistent work of the teachers, we feature two English panel members who were identified through data analysis and recommendation within the school:

- **Miss Kit Lee**, for her ability to reflect upon her own teaching practices, and
- **Mr Joe Chan**, for his ability to contextualise the language for his students in a meaningful and engaging way.

In sum, the whole school has worked together for the benefit of the students. The report will highlight the organisation of the English panel as well as the actions of certain individuals in the successful implementation of the principal's vision and policies. It will also elaborate on how the English "culture" at YLLSS has developed into a pervasive force and how it is sustained through a range of extra-curricular activities and student engagement.

Principal Wong Wing Shu's vision has been at the heart of numerous policy changes in English-learning at YLLSS.

A student-centred vision

Care and concern for the future of her students is at the centre of Principal Wong's vision. In today's society, this means gaining access to further education.

When the principal arrived at the school six years ago, she found that the limiting factor for university admittance was English results. She therefore implemented numerous policies to improve the school's English results. Six years later, the number of students attending university has increased greatly.

However, because the principal's vision is rooted in a concern for the students, the school's ultimate goal is not just to improve English results. **The true success of YLLSS lies not only in being able to increase English results but also in its creation of a culture of English-learning**. Students and staff alike are motivated to use and learn English, because they see a purpose for it, because it is presented as something enjoyable, and because it fosters strong relationships.

Aside from a clear vision, YLLSS has become what it is today because the school has taken concrete steps to realise its vision. The school's approach to solving problems has been at the centre of successful implementation of its policies.

FURTHER EDUCATION (goal) => ENGLISH AS LIMITING FACTOR (identification of areas of improvement) => Focus on English (produce and implement solutions)

In order to realise her vision, Principal Wong first had to review the school context and identify the areas that the school needed to work on. In this case, it was through the analysis of public exam results that English surfaced as a limiting factor.

Today, policy changes and initiatives are still driven by analysis of examination results. A research team, headed by Vice-principal Lo, is responsible for assisting panels to review the data, and the process of solving problems is as follows:

Having identified where the problem lies, the next step is to identify and implement the practical solutions. Because of the way the school's English panel is structured, many decisions are made collectively, or in consultation with school management. The existence of the research group to help the panel make decisions is one example. Another example is the vice-principal's role to act as a communication link between the principal and the panel.

There are, of course, decisions that are made unilaterally, such as the decision to allocate resources for the English chat room or to hire teaching assistants. When faced with questions about these types of decisions, the school must therefore justify its decisions and work with people who may disagree with them.
Read more about how the principal has worked with staff members to convince them of the need for change.

Finally, all policies undergo an evaluation process. For example, the success of the English chat room is evident in the number of students who use it and are willing to speak English in it. Other policies, such as whether to split classes in Forms Four and Five, can be measured by the change in public exam results.

This problem-solving process is responsible for generating and monitoring numerous policy decisions, including the establishment of Collective Lesson-Planning meetings, the evolving role of the NET, and the establishment of remedial classes.

The Vice-Principal's Bridging Role

Mr Lo, the vice-principal of YLLSS, is also the Dean of Studies. In 1998, he was given the role of improving the school's level of academic achievement. However, at first, his duties were more specific, as the principal pointed out in an interview:

"I asked the vice-principal to supervise the English panel in order to strengthen it. I wanted a strong administrator to help make decisions and get things done...."

Providing logistical and administrative support

By training, Mr Lo is a mathematics teacher, and he has also taught some science subjects. However, as part of the English support group, Mr Lo helps the English panel develop English policies. With his expertise and position, he is able to help them devise and modify their ideas before they submit them to the principal.

In brief, Mr Lo acts as a bridge between the English panel and the school management. He also acts as a channel of communication between panels and the principal.

Mr Lo attends English panel meetings and has also been involved in the following intitiatives:

THE VICE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

- The English support group
- Collective Lesson-Planning (CLP)
- Redeployment of the NET
- Mentoring scheme
- Researching external/internal exam results
- Recruitment of new staff

Mediating voices of dissent

Because of his experience, Mr Lo commands respect from teachers across the school and this makes it easier for the principal to implement new policies. When Principal Wong began to implement changes in the school, she asked Mr Lo to coordinate these changes at the staffroom level. Miss Chan, the English panel chair, said:

"He persuaded the other departments that a lot of resources should be given to our panel. Sometimes he faced comments from other teachers and he is the one who tried to persuade the others that English is really an important subject in our school."

Structural factors: The usefulness of a mediator between the administration and the panel

Many teachers and panel chairs in Hong Kong cite the heavy administrative workload as an obstacle to their own effectiveness as team-leaders. However, at YLLSS, the support given by the vice-principal has helped to reduce that workload and enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the English department.
As Miss Chan, the panel chair, explains, this support is not only practical but also psychological.

THE VICE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

Personal factors: Mr Lo's accessibility as a person

Mr Lo tries to make himself accessible to teachers:

> "I just try to talk to them. Because actually some of them know that this is the aim of the school [to improve English]. I'm a friendly person to all colleagues and I can get along with most. That's my strength I would say."

Mr Lo's personal commitment and ability to communicate with and relate to his colleagues from all subject areas has contributed to the successful implementation of new policies. In our school visits, Mr Lo was often found discussing matters with teachers in the corridor or staffroom and organising strategies in an open and non-threatening way.

The research team at YLLSS has played a key role in the improvement of English teaching and learning at YLLSS.

The sole purpose of the team is to identify and monitor the progress of every class and student. One research method used is the analysis of examination results. The data from the results are interpreted and fed back to the relevant panel heads. Discussions are then held to decide on the best way forward in light of the results, and meetings with teachers or panels are organised to work out solutions to the problems identified in the study of class results. This analysis of learning outcomes in the form of examination and test results is linked directly to the mission of the principal, which is to improve on academic achievement, particularly in the English language. The research team is able to monitor academic results by looking at the statistics coming from the classroom.

In most schools, each subject panel is responsible for monitoring students' performance in the respective subject in internal and public examinations. In YLLSS, the research team does this. The advantage of this is that the performance of students can be examined more objectively. Moreover, it frees up more time for subject teachers to focus on teaching. Examination and test results are analysed so that teaching and the curriculum can be improved. Studies of class results can be carried out by comparing results over a number of years, or the study can be done longitudinally in S.5 and S.6.

By analysing results as outlined above, teachers were able to identify weaknesses in reading comprehension in the upper Forms culminating in poor results in the HKCEE reading paper (Paper II). The school responded by introducing a school-based textbook in the junior-forms that focused on reading skills. Such responsive action allows for better coordination in teaching upper and lower Forms.

Such close scrutiny of the academic performance of students could be threatening to teachers. This point was raised in interviews. Mr Hugo Tam, an Integrated Science teacher, explained that the results are taken from the research unit and given to the panel chairs. These panel chairs have been given training on how to interpret the data, and they are then able to produce reports on individual classes or forms. If they need additional statistical analysis or technical support, the research team will provide it. Mr Tam says that the sole objective of the research is to identify students' weaknesses and trends (if any), not to put any blame on teachers. If students have improved in an area, the research team will try to find out why, and to identify how the experience can be transferred to other areas.

In other words, teachers reflect on examination results as a team and use them as input for further improvement in teaching and learning. A cycle has emerged where teachers look at results, reflect and share on experiences, and then decide on remedial action collectively. The spirit of collaboration means that teachers feel more secure about addressing weaknesses and sharing strengths.

The evaluation of teaching and learning through the research team has lead to a number of initiatives at the classroom and panel level. For example, when examination results revealed weaknesses in students' understanding of grammar, the school authorised the development of school-based textbooks and resources to help the students. The school is committed to continuous improvement, and this is a recurring theme throughout the exemplar.

Collective Lesson-Planning

Observation of three separate Collective Lesson-Planning (CLP) meetings (in S.1 and S.3) revealed that the meetings were full of rich interaction and dialogue about students' performance, teaching ideas, and critiques of textbooks. From these observations it is clear that CLP provides teachers with opportunities to do the following:

- Share ideas
- Evaluate teaching material
- Design test items and discuss exam results
- Discuss problematic classes and students
- Decide on a more uniform approach to teaching across the Forms
- Provide support for new colleagues
- Develop working relationships with colleagues
- Come up with useful alternatives to existing practices

The content of the meetings we observed was impressive. To highlight the amount of interaction and sharing of professional knowledge in these 40-minute sessions, the discussions in the three CLP meetings that were observed and videotaped have been classified and tabulated as follows:

Discussions about teaching resources

- Discussing Unit 5 of the textbook
- Evaluating the school-based grammar book
- Sharing information and materials (EMB poem)
- Discussing difficulties with readers
- Use of the reader
- Evaluating the reader
- Critiquing the textbook
- Deciding which units to teach from the textbook
- Evaluating the textbook
- Adapting the textbook

Discussions about teaching skills

- Sharing ideas about class presentations
- Teaching vocabulary (ideas)
- Teaching vocabulary (dictionary use)
- Sharing teaching ideas about vocabulary

The Basics of Collective Lesson-Planning

How are CLP meetings organised?

While in many schools collaboration may exist on an informal, ad hoc basis, junior-form teachers in YLLSS have Collective Lesson-Planning (CLP) meetings written into the timetable once a cycle. Although the Form Coordinator is responsible for passing on information and setting the general agenda, teachers usually take it in turns to lead the meetings. Each teacher is invited to prepare one unit from the textbook and then share ideas and materials with his or her colleagues at the relevant meeting.

Where did the CLP meetings come from?

The (CLP) meetings began in response to a task-based textbook introduced in S.1-2 two years ago. The switch to a task-based approach necessitated more sharing among the English panel. Miss Vina Lee, an English teacher, said,

> "Task-based teaching is very creative, so we needed to pool our ideas. Many of us were not sure about the new book because we were used to a different textbook approach to teaching. We realised that we needed to sit down and work together."

The idea for Collective Lesson-Planning is a classic example of how initiatives are developed through negotiation in YLLSS. When the principal sought outside help to enable teachers to adapt to task-based learning, teachers were resistant. Instead, they offered to draw on the expertise within the panel and among colleagues. With the help of the vice-principal, Mr Lo, CLP meetings were set up. They are so successful that they now occur across all main junior-form subjects (mathematics, English and Chinese).

1) A way of promoting cooperation within the English panel and providing support for Form Coordinators.

THE BENEFITS OF CLP

The implementation of CLP has strengthened the sense of teamwork, which is normally the goal of the Form Coordinator in charge of a particular year.

The other advantage for the Form Coordinator is that he is able to obtain materials and support from the team. The sharing of ideas is now a two-way process, and this is particularly helpful in breaking down barriers in the staffroom. Meeting regularly and discussing teaching in a professional manner has led to the emergence of a sharing culture in the staffroom and better relationships between staff members.

The Form Coordinator can also provide more effective leadership because he is able to get to know colleagues better at the CLP meetings and find out which teaching methods they prefer and what their particular strengths or weaknesses are.

The English panel chair speaks of greater cooperation and collaboration in the panel. The panel chair claims that this development is due to "better communication" through CLP and in particular, communication that centres on the performance of students and their difficulties in learning English.

Looking to the future, the panel chair is planning to introduce forms so that Form Coordinators can record the points raised in the meetings. This would mean that S.2 teachers would have access to the ideas of S.1 teachers and vice versa. More importantly, it is hoped that the forms and the dissemination will help to improve the sequencing of lessons between S.1 and S.3.

2) To provide support for new teachers

CLP meetings have helped novice teachers and new teachers to the school in a number of ways.

Miss Venus Heung, who joined the school in 2002, has been able to see the benefits of CLP to her own teaching. She has been able to benefit from her colleagues' experience and has developed the confidence to share her own ideas at these meetings. She believes that working together is useful, and she enjoys the responsibility of chairing CLP meetings.

3) To provide a more consistent approach to teaching across forms

One of the most significant benefits of the move towards formalised collaboration has been the impact on teaching and learning in the school. With six classes in each form and many of those classes ranging in abilities, the CLP period has provided an opportunity for teachers to standardise their approach to teaching English. In CLP meetings, teachers discuss the progress of each class and highlight particular problems that they may be having with classes or individual students. In sum, the CLP meetings have contributed towards a more uniform teaching approach.

This uniform approach has also assisted greatly in the writing of term tests and exams. By discussing the progress of individual classes, teachers are able to identify common weaknesses in their students' work and act accordingly. At the CLP meetings, various approaches to teaching are discussed, as well as topics to be covered. However, there is still flexibility allowed for individual teachers to make modifications according to their students' abilities. The more information each class teacher provides, the easier it becomes for those who set tests to design appropriate assessment tools.

CLP meetings help teachers to gain ideas and inspiration for their language lessons. However, the activities and ideas are usually adapted and modified to meet the needs of individual classes and students.

The integration of CLP with effective practices in the classroom is best demonstrated in S.1. Teachers are able to share ideas and resources and then build upon them in their own classroom, which leads to professional development.

4) Inculcating critical evaluations of textbooks and teaching resources

Every member of the junior English panel we interviewed cited the benefit of being able to evaluate and critique the textbook in CLP meetings. The meetings also allow for sharing ideas on the development of school-based teaching materials.

While teachers have been able to use CLP periods to share teaching materials and brainstorm ideas, the collaboration has also extended to evaluating the textbook that is used across forms. Initially, CLP meetings were instigated in order to help teachers prepare for a new textbook. The meetings still focus on how to get the most out of a textbook (which the teachers readily admit does not suit the needs of all their students). CLP meetings are used to determine which components of the textbook are most important and which can be overlooked. A great deal of modification also takes place in order to deal with the problem of learner differences.

In CLP meetings, teachers share their teaching experiences and discuss the progress of individual classes. If students or classes are having difficulties in certain areas, teachers are able to solicit help and ideas from colleagues. The rest of the form teachers are then aware of progress being made in the coverage of teaching units. Through this collaboration, teachers are empowered to make changes to their teaching schedules and materials with the help and support of colleagues.

Some members of the English panel have written school-based materials to cover grammar and pronunciation because the textbook does not satisfy the requirements of the panel and their students. What has made these school-based materials more effective is the feedback gained from colleagues during CLP meetings. As a result, materials are constantly updated and revised.

The Vocabulary Game

The vocabulary game is an example of an idea that was shared and adapted by the S.1 teachers of YLLSS. An in-depth look at this game shows how CLP meetings helped teachers to:

- share ideas and material, and
- critically evaluate the suitability of the activities for their particular students.

Miss Kit Lee, a teacher at YLLSS, came up with a game last year to help her students distinguish between country names, nationalities and dialects (e.g., China, Chinese, Cantonese/Putonghua).

When this unit came up again this year, Miss Lee shared this idea with her colleagues. Click on the video clip of Miss Lee explaining the game to her colleagues.

Read more about Arousing and maintaining learner interest

Read more about The conception and adaptation of the vocabulary game by Miss Kit Lee.

Rules of the game

The vocabulary game is self-explanatory. Miss Kit Lee divides the students into two teams. Each team elects a student to come out to the front. The teacher shows a word from their vocabulary list. (e.g., Singapore) The student must then communicate this word so that his or her teammates can guess it. ("It is a country in Asia...") If the team can guess it, they win a point. If they cannot, the other team gets to guess.

Watch students trying to guess "ice-skating rink"

Watch Kit do a follow-up after the game

Adaptation

Miss Kit Lee explaining how she changes the game to maintain students' interest

"I was afraid they would be bored after playing this two or three times already...so I adjusted the difficulty [of the game]."

As an effective teacher, Miss Kit Lee is aware that even a good game can lose its effect if repeated over and over. In order to maintain students' interest, she suggests the following:

- Change the teams - instead of determining them by seating plans, have boys against girls.
- Make the game more strategic - change the scoring of the words to reflect their level of difficulty, and also allow the teams to play a "trump card" to double their points if they get the word right.
- Encourage weaker students to come up - by allowing them to ask a friend to come up to the front with them.

The video clip where two students attempt to explain "A French singer" demonstrates the points made above. In addition, students are able to demonstrate the use of grammatical terms.

Playing the Vocabulary Game

The research team watched two other teachers, Miss Vina Lee and Miss Debby Leung, play the vocabulary game with their students. Each teacher modified the game to suit their own teaching style, their relationship with their class and the needs of their students.

Miss Vina Lee's 1E class was weaker than Miss Kit Lee's class, so Miss Vina Lee was conscious of the need to modify the game. Unlike Miss Kit Lee, who picked the words for her students, Miss Vina Lee allowed students to pick the words. Eventually, she also allowed students to refer to the list of words in their textbooks.

Miss Vina Lee did not allow questions to be asked, preferring the game to be a closed activity. However, she said that she thought having "yes-no" questions would be a good idea next time students played the game.

1E already has established teams that run throughout the school term. The vocabulary game is therefore one of several games in which the teams compete with each other. The scores accumulate throughout the unit.

See a video of Miss Vina Lee's class playing the game.

Miss Debby Leung was the form tutor of 1B in 2003/04 as well as their English teacher. In playing the game for the first time, Miss Debby Leung was open to negotiating the rules of the game with her students.

"Does each of us agree that before you guess the answer you should ask a question?" she asked in response to a student's suggestion.

Like Miss Vina Lee, Miss Debby Leung played the game with more than two teams (groups of eight).

Since Miss Debby Leung limited the number of hints that students could give in their explanation, questioning became more important in the game. Anyone in the class could ask questions, not just the students in each team.

See a video of Miss Debby Leung's class playing the game.

Conclusion

The collaboration between English teachers in the lower forms has empowered many staff members. In interviews, teachers shared their feelings of security and confidence after sharing their teaching experiences and ideas with colleagues. CLP was not welcomed at first and was seen as "compulsory" because of the timetable slot. Some teachers even feared that the meeting would add to their workload. However, teachers soon came to see this one period every cycle as a valuable opportunity for genuine collaboration and sharing of professional knowledge. By involving all teachers and by delegating leadership duties equally, there was also a sense of "ownership". Teachers felt that ideas were not imposed from above.

The positive attitude towards CLP is evident from comments made by several teachers who said that they would like to see similar meetings in the upper forms. They mentioned that CLP might help make teaching less exam-oriented and break down "barriers" in the staff room.

At YLLSS, professional development occurred as the result of a policy initiative. The teachers believed they needed time to reflect on and plan for the adoption of a new textbook, so instead of asking the teachers to meet outside of school hours, the principal included a single lesson per cycle for professional sharing and planning in the timetable.

A further sign that the CLP lessons are valued at YLLSS is that the school has timetabled similar lessons for the mathematics and Chinese panels. The plan is to extend this to the integrated science panel in the coming academic year (2004/05).

Mentors: The English panel chair and another senior teacher from the panel.

Mentoring scheme: Involves the supervised teacher being invited to observe the mentor in class. The mentor then visits and comments on the supervised teacher's class. This process occurs twice a term.

Other approaches: Team teaching (by working together in a split class) and working together on material design. Both the mentor and the supervised teacher teach in the same form to ensure closer collaboration.

Benefits for the mentee

When Miss Venus Heung first came to YLLSS two years ago, there was no mentoring scheme in place. While other colleagues were able to offer advice, Miss Heung hesitated to bother them with too many questions. Now with the panel chair — Miss Zoe Chan — as her mentor, Miss Heung has someone she can turn to. Under this scheme, the mentee gains:

- **Access to the mentor's teaching experience**
  Placed with a Form Five class, Miss Heung was able to benefit from Miss Chan's experience, both as a teacher and as an oral examiner.
- **Support and advice from a senior teacher**
- **Information about the school system**

By observing an experienced teacher at work, the new teacher learns through example.

- **Constructive feedback**
  - Observation of the mentee's class by an experienced teacher is beneficial. Although the mentor has to fill in a lesson observation form, Miss Chan emphasised that the form serves as an official record of the mentee's strengths rather than weaknesses. Positive comments are usually written on the form while negative ones are discussed verbally with the mentee.

For Miss Heung, having a mentor improved her confidence, helped her to settle into the school more easily and developed her professionally.

Benefits for the mentor

Having Miss Heung as her mentee helped Miss Chan to be more sensitive to the needs of other panel members.

In addition to having a mentor, junior teachers can also get support from their colleagues in Collective Lesson-Planning meetings.

From observations and interviews, there seems to be certain beliefs or factors that underpin this "culture of English".

1. Teachers and students as role models

Through their own actions, teachers in YLLSS consistently demonstrate to the students that:

- English is a communicative tool.
- Not only are all English teachers required to use English with students in and out of class, but other subject teachers also participate in speaking and learning English with students.
- Even the principal can be found in the school corridors speaking in English with students.
- Furthermore, as the English Club and activities are coordinated by students, they are able to learn from one another through peer learning.

Read more about role-modelling at the school.

A CULTURE OF ENGLISH

Listen to two students talk about the "English atmosphere" and why the students are so confident

2. Emphasis on reward and enjoyment rather than punishment
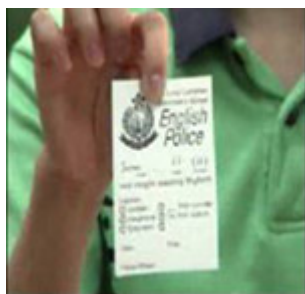
As the principal suggests, the school's vision of helping students better themselves academically stems from a concern and love for the students. The school places emphasis on encouraging, rewarding, and making English interesting for students. Rather than providing negative reinforcement for students who use Cantonese, the school rewards and praises the use of English in and out of class.

One example of how this works in practice is the presence of the "English police", who patrol the halls on English Speaking Days and "arrest" students who are found speaking English. Students using English are given tickets from the police and these tickets are then redeemed for prizes.

As a result, students associate English with something that is fun and rewarding, and thus become more motivated to use English. Involvement with various English activities gives students a real sense of ownership.

Read more about how the school emphasises rewards and confidence building.

3. Learning takes time

Teachers at YLLSS understand the importance of long-term goals in education. As a result, the English panel focuses on generating students' interest in English early on in their secondary school education. This form of "learner training" ensures that students get into the habit of speaking and using English. Students are well prepared when they begin to study for the public examinations during the upper forms.

Junior form students have lots of opportunities to speak English during class activities, as well as a host of extra-curricular activities. On English Speaking Days, students are required to converse with senior-form students and teachers through different communication tasks.

Role-Modelling

The English "culture" at the school has emerged in a short period of time and can be seen in the way that students and teachers willingly engage in English conversations outside of the classroom. One possible reason for this is that Mr Johnson's oral curriculum as well as the many activities held for students by the English Club have enhanced students' confidence in speaking English. However, another factor that has underpinned the English culture at YLLSS is the modelling of English by teachers and students.

One of the principal's first requests in 1998 was that English teachers act as role models for their students by using English at all times, both in and out of class. This has been successful, but its success was galvanised by the support received from other non-language teachers who have also volunteered to participate in English activities and use English with their students away from the classroom. Two senior students noted that "other subject teachers...even the science teachers, actually support English very much," and the English panel chair praised her non-language-teaching colleagues for speaking English and "helping to establish the atmosphere of using English inside the classroom and also outside the classroom".

Despite being a CMI school, non-English teachers feel that their efforts are helping the school to promote better English. Because teachers are modelling the language and setting an example, students also feel encouraged and motivated to use English because of the non-threatening atmosphere.

Role-modelling is not restricted to teachers, however. Students reported that they are more inclined to use English outside class because their peers do. One example is the English Club, where all meetings are conducted in English and where members from senior forms help younger members using English. Students are also given responsibility through various leadership positions, and many respond positively by setting an example to their schoolmates and speaking in English. One senior student claimed that her English improved because she had to use English in the club meetings when she was a junior-form student. She said that it helped her overcome her fear of using English and boosted her confidence. Now that she is a senior student, she tries to set a good example for the younger students "because she can motivate them to speak English".

The willingness of all parties to use English in and out of class is a distinctive feature of the school.

Students seem to be intrinsically motivated to use English outside the class, as revealed in the membership numbers of the English Club and the voluntary participation of students and staff in English-speaking activities. Apart from the positive reinforcement and support received from their peers and members of staff, students are also motivated by other rewards for using English. These rewards are most common on English Speaking Days, which are a distinctive feature of the informal curriculum.

On an English Speaking Day, the corridors at recess and lunchtime are full of students and teachers talking to one another in English in a free and happy manner. One of the reasons for this is the way that the school has provided positive incentives for using English rather than penalising students for using Cantonese. In short, students are rewarded for using English and not punished for using Cantonese or remaining quiet.

When this idea was initially proposed by the NET, Mr Johnson, the school culture was not quite ready for it. The NET reported that the school management believed students should be penalised for not using English and this led to some disagreement among staff. The idea was put into practice a few times, until gradually the rules were relaxed and the focus switched to reward instead of punishment. It was an immediate success, and shows how policies and programmes can evolve through open dialogue, negotiation and a system of trial-and-error on the part of students.

What makes the English Speaking Days so innovative is the establishment of the "English Police" who patrol the school corridors "arresting" students who are heard using English. The "police" are actually members of the English Club, and when they arrest a student or teacher, they present the person with a ticket that can be redeemed for a prize. The "police" and the teachers all contribute to the inviting atmosphere that surrounds these activities, and the prizes motivate students further. Students interviewed reported that they felt proud and happy when they could speak to senior students and their teachers in English. Although the prizes were appreciated, many claimed that the feeling of satisfaction and confidence outweighed the material benefits. This suggests that students are intrinsically motivated through the activities and the positive reinforcement they receive from the school.

The English Club is at the centre of the English-enhancement activities at YLLSS, and its growth is an impressive indicator of how students' interest in English has grown over the last few years.

1. Expansion of the English Club

Three years ago, the English Club had about 50 members. Since the arrival of Mr Jeremy Johnson, the NET, and the support provided by Miss Kit Lee and Mr Joe Chan, the club has grown into the biggest extra-curricular club in the school.

> "We got 200 members that year and the next year, 250 members. This is not compulsory and then this year we've got over 300 members... so we completely turned the club around."

2. NET's role includes running the English Club

One of the people who has had a tremendous impact on the club, and therefore the culture of the school, is the NET, Mr Jeremy Johnson. Through negotiation with the school management, Mr Johnson was given the role of coordinating the English Club, other extra-curricular activities and teaching a comprehensive oral course to all forms. Mr Johnson's commitment, accessibility and leadership have clearly left a strong impression on the students.

3. An organisational structure that effectively mobilises students and staff

The English Club works under the leadership of a chairperson and three vice-chairpersons. This group of students works closely with Mr Johnson. The English Club meets once a cycle in the English chatroom to plan and review activities. Each officer is responsible for mobilising a group of English Club members whenever activities are held. In many ways the students are doing the teacher's job in facilitating the English Club events. The English Club work out the organisation and the classes take responsibility for their own participation. In sum, there is collective responsibility.

Students also work closely with teachers to initiate and organise new ideas. This empowerment of the student body has greatly increased levels of participation in English Club activities.

4. Impact of the English club

"The English club has managed to find senior students who are interested in English, and are interested in developing the club and organising activities... They look after the younger students and it's great fun. There's English Speaking Day, there are prizes, there's the English police... all this appeals to the students. **They feel that speaking English is really fun**. And it really works. Their voluntary participation really changes things. So I want to underscore the success of the English Club's work." (Mr Tam, science teacher)

English Chatroom

"[The principal] gave me this full-sized classroom. She gave me [some money] to buy equipment and everything you see here, a DVD player, a TV, lots and lots of books, computers, that nice stereo, and lots of lots of things that she allowed me to buy..."

Located in one of the most visible and accessible areas on the ground-floor corridor, the English chatroom serves as a friendly meeting place for students. They are allowed to snack and drink in a relaxed and comfortable environment with their peers and teachers. During normal class time, the room serves as an oral classroom for Mr Johnson and his classes. After school, it is used by English Club members for meetings, and for Mr Johnson's regular exam practice sessions.

View the chatroom and find out why this space helps students improve their English.

English Speaking Day

English Speaking Day at YLLSS is full of rich and lively conversation. A typical activity is as follows: **Students are given slips of paper with topics on them. They then have to introduce themselves to senior-form students and teachers and talk about one of the topics**. After they have talked for a minute or so, they get a signature on the paper. No more than two signatures may be collected for each topic, forcing students to broaden their topics of conversation and approach more people.

1. English as communication

By speaking with other students and teachers, students are able to get immediate feedback on what they say. They may be asked questions or pushed to clarify what they say. The language use is dynamic, communicative and useful. Senior students develop their listening skills and enhanced relationships between students of different forms are fostered.

2. Role-modelling and peer learning

By speaking to senior students and teachers, students not only get to talk with someone who may be more experienced in English than they are, but they also get the message that English is a language that other people use. Even other subject teachers join in, demonstrating that English is not just the domain of the English teachers. As Lydia notes, "The students are quite curious about those teachers [from other subjects], especially their English ability."

Read more about the impact of English Speaking Day.

The Impact of English Speaking Day

Consider the following comments from two S.1 boys who were interviewed during an English Speaking Day,

> **Interviewer**: How do you feel when you are speaking in English?
> **Boy 1**: I feel very afraid I think because this is the first time I have spoken to F.6 students. They are better than me so I'm afraid I will say the wrong thing and they will laugh at me.
> **Interviewer**: Did they laugh at you?
> **Boy 1**: No!
> **Interviewer**: What did they do?
> **Boy 1**: They say I can speak well...
> **Boy 2**: I think I am happier!
> **Boy 1**: Because they say I am good so you will feel good to speak English so don't be afraid to speak in English.
> **Interviewer**: Are you more confident now?
> **Boy 1**: Yes
> **Interviewer**: Do you think you use more English now?
> **Boy 1**: Yes
> **Interviewer**: Not just on speaking days but on other days, do you use more English?
> **Boy 1**: Many times.
> **Interviewer**: Really. When?
> **Boy 1**: In the recess to practice more English so we can make our English more perfect and our exam will not be so difficult.

These two boys had spoken to five people (including this researcher) voluntarily in English as part of English Speaking Day, and the comments above summarise the success of the school in encouraging an "English culture" at YLLSS.

The following is a list of benefits of English Speaking Day:

1. **The students note that they are less afraid (overcoming learner anxiety)**
2. **They feel empowered by the activity (F.6 students)**
3. **They receive positive reinforcement from their peers (peer support and modelling)**
4. **The speakers feel rewarded and motivated**
5. **They gain more intrinsic motivation, but at the same time realise that the activity will help them get better results (extrinsic motivation linked to the school vision/aim)**
6. **They have the confidence to speak to one another in English away from activities and class (learner autonomy)**

A new scheme recently launched at YLLSS is the presence of the "English Police", who "arrest" students caught speaking English... in order to reward them!

This scheme has clearly captured the imagination of students. Watch them explain it in the video and click here to view:

- Instructions for English Police Agents
- Police Agent's weekly report sheet

However, as the NET explains, when he first suggested the scheme, the school thought it would be better to penalise the use of Cantonese. Through negotiation and experimentation, a cultural shift took place and the focus of the activity became reward rather than punishment.

Read more details about how the English Police scheme reflects a cultural shift in the school from punishment to reward.

Instructions for English Police Agents

1) When you hear two or more people speaking English outside their lessons, give them each a ticket.
2) Fill-in your Weekly Agent's Report and turn it in by 2:00 on Friday.
3) Every time you give a ticket, that person's name and your name will go in the "lucky draw" box.
4) If you give a ticket to someone who's not in your class, your name will go in the box twice!
5) How much English do they have to speak to get a ticket? More than "Hello"! If they speak two sentences each, that's probably enough, but not "How are you? I'm fine. And you? I'm fine, too." ☺

English Police Agent's Weekly Report

Agent: _____ Class: _____ Number: _____

Name, class, number	Location	Date

Thank you!!

Remember...
speaking English is
a piece of cake!

Other Activities

TV game show

English network
(weekly radio show)

Aside from English-Speaking days, other activities that occurred in YLLSS during 2003-2004 included:

- Crazy Halloween Party (October)
- F.2 Vocabulary competition (December)
- F.1 Storytelling competition (April)
- F.2 Drama competition (May)
- F.4 Oral presentation (July)
- F.3-F.4 DJ group competition
- English Speech Festival (first term)
- Solo speaking contest
- English Club parties and carnivals (Christmas, Chinese New Year, Easter, etc.)
- English network: Lunchtime radio shows

English worship assemblies

Christmas party

Chinese New Year party

Halloween mask-making

Solo speaking contest

When Principal Wong made English a priority six years ago, many changes ensued. For English teachers, it meant additional work. For other panels, the fact that the English panel received additional resources caused some surprise and even discontent.

Why then, five to six years later, have the voices of dissent disappeared?

1. Teachers can see that when English results are good, the whole school benefits

For teachers' upset that the English panel seemed to be getting priority treatment, the school made it clear that it was not a matter of favouritism, but rather because the English results were a limiting factor for their students' future. As Mr Tam, a science teacher, notes, "If the school felt that other subjects needed to improve, they would have devoted more effort and put more resources into them."

Furthermore, improved English results have meant a better intake of students. In addition, subjects such as science or mathematics that are examined in the medium of English have also seen an improvement in their results. There is a shared sense that the whole school is working together for students.

2. The role of personal communication and persuasion

In order to make her vision a reality, the principal worked hard to foster strong relationships and open channels of communication:

"In these past few years, I have personally been involved in the meetings of the English panel. My relationship with the staff is not only a principal-teacher relationship, but I am also their colleague. When English teachers encounter problems, I will take it through with them step by step... if my teachers feel that this is extra work or pressure, I will sit down and talk with them, and explain to them why we need to do this."

Furthermore, the principal assigned Mr Lo, the vice-principal, to help with the administrative work of the English panel. Having someone to mediate between the vision expressed by the principal and the actions carried out by the teachers helped to reduce any tension and anxiety among teachers.

3. The importance of patience and persistence

The changes outlined in this project at YLLSS did not happen immediately:

"If you have the belief that you want [the students] to acquire better English, then it is possible. Of course, all of us have to work very hard... not just for a short period of time. It takes

time and you need to, you know, make some adaptations...
and then you must be patient. Give yourself time and also give
the students time." *(Zoe Chan, panel chair)*

When people at YLLSS are asked who is responsible for the change in the school's culture, Jeremy Johnson's name is frequently mentioned. Why has this NET made such an impact in the school?

Jeremy's impact on the school and individual students is a testimony to his devotion to the students, and to a school that was able to give him a role where he could exercise his strengths.

Aside from teaching oral classes to the whole school, Jeremy's role includes running the English Club, working with the support group members, writing school-based textbooks, and helping non-English subject teachers with their L2 development.

Explore further:

- [An evolving role](): **How the school allowed Jeremy to maximise his strengths**
- [Building relationships](): **The NET's relationship with students and staff**
- [Jeremy's impact](): **What students and staff have to say about him**
- [Jeremy's classes](): **Pronunciation, IPA and the school-based oral book**

The Envolving Role of the NET

Unsuited to teaching regular classes

When Mr Jeremy Johnson first came to YLLSS four years ago, he was assigned two regular grammar classes and one oral class. However, he found the difference between the American and Hong Kong syllabi quite challenging. As Mr Johnson recounts:

> "The syllabus was so different for me, that I found that I could not teach grammar here. I wasn't successful teaching grammar here, so the switch to all oral was because I wasn't successful at teaching grammar."

THE ROLE OF THE NET

Negotiating a role more suited to his talents

In order to capitalise on their NET's strengths, Mr Lo, the vice-principal, discussed with Mr Johnson how they might better employ him in a way that was more "comfortable for him and comfortable for us". Over the course of three years, Mr Johnson's role evolved from teaching two regular grammar classes to:

- Teaching all 27 oral classes in the school
- Developing school-based IPA textbooks/oral curriculum
- Running the English Club, the chatroom and English activities
- Supporting other teachers (including non-English teachers) by answering language questions

"The right person in the right place"

The role Mr Johnson eventually moved into was much better suited to his talents. Mr Lo cites the negotiation of Mr Johnson's role as one of the most significant policies responsible for the development of the English culture in the school.

> "He is a good organiser when organising all the activities. He likes that too. And he had that experience too.... I would say it's using the right person in the right place."

Developing Relationships with Students and Staff

In deciding where to deploy the NET, one consideration should be how to allow a NET to develop relationships with staff and students. Far too often NETs are isolated because of their language and culture and are not used as effectively as they could be.

A role that allows the NET to develop a relationship with students

The decision to have Mr Johnson teach all oral and run the activities is complementary. Not teaching regular classes frees him from marking, and running the English Club allows him to develop relationships with the students.

> "I've heard some NETs say I can't develop a close relationship with any of the students because I have 1,200 students. But for me that's not true, because with the English Club, I develop a very close relationship with those officers. Very close."

"And then, teaching the senior-form classes, especially Forms Six and Seven, I do get to have a pretty good relationship with them. I don't have a close rapport with the Form Ones and Twos, maybe even three students, because I only see them once every two cycles. But...that's okay for me. I'm okay with that."

A role that integrates the NET into the panel

Running the English activities has also brought Mr Johnson into contact with other English panel members, as well as other staff members.

> "I'm supervising, but each teacher is in charge of a set activity, and then I have to work closely with that teacher. So that's how I developed close relationships with nearly every teacher in the form through working on an activity."

Increased exposure to a native speaker helps everyone

Both students and teachers benefit from the increased exposure to the NET. Whereas students used to be afraid to approach the NET, nowadays they see him in activities and know that they can find him in the chatroom. As Mr Johnson explains, "As a NET teaching oral – every class, every kid has interaction with me. And they're not shy. They're open, they're free".

Teachers similarly benefit from this new role. For example, the science teachers felt comfortable enough to take the initiative to ask Mr Johnson to hold English workshops for their professional development after school.

The effectiveness of an integrated NET

The panel chair, Ms Zoe Chan, explains the importance of a NET who works with the panel, rather than alone:

> "[It's a] better use of the NET teacher, I think. Because the previous NET teacher, the lady was also hard-working, but maybe she was very hard-working on her own and it's very difficult to get her to help with the activities. Now with Mr

Johnson, we get him to help with the activities and find there is this atmosphere in using English in our school."

Better oral results

According to Mr Hugo Tam, who is in charge of keeping track of the school's results:

> "In the past, our oral scores were bad. But these few years have seen a marked improvement, and I believe it's because Mr Johnson has really put a lot of work in preparing the students. They have this month-long gap between the written exam and the oral. Mr Johnson will organise a timetable and ask the students to come back and practise with him."

At lunchtime and after school, Mr Johnson can be "booked" for exam practice or conversation. However, aside from directly working with students on their pronunciation and oral exams, the activities that Mr Johnson has designed also increase their opportunities and confidence in speaking English.

Mr Johnson's impact on the students

RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS

When Mint Chan, S.6, won the *South China Morning Post's* Best Improvement Award, we asked her to name the most important thing she did to build her confidence. Her answer reveals the importance of Mr Johnson's encouragement:

> "The first thing that comes to mind is Jeremy encouraging me to speak in English and you know it's a difficult subject to improve. I scored a grade E in my cert level and my spoken English is really poor but he always encouraged me to speak in it and to teach me to modify my accent and to modify my pronunciation and I can follow his guidance and make me feel, I trust I have the ability to improve it."

Mr Johnson is clearly a teacher who is well loved by his students. When asked what they have gained from running the English Club, the executive members cited "getting to know Mr Johnson" as one of their reasons. Mr Johnson's popularity can be traced to his commitment to the students, as well as to his creativity. When working with him, students come to see English as something fun and exciting.

Mr Johnson's impact on other teachers

Other teachers also talk about Mr Johnson as being someone who is accessible to them. As Mr Tam, a science teacher, notes:

> "Mr Johnson's very good – even outside these sharing sessions [workshops with the science and maths teachers], when our colleagues talk to him, he will talk to us about classes. Actually, just talking [to him] in that session is practice in itself."

Mr Johnson's impact on the school

The principal, the vice-principal, the panel and two former English Club chairs all cite Mr Johnson's role in the school as instrumental in creating an atmosphere conducive to speaking English. Aside from his own commitment and devotion, Mr Johnson helps present English as something that is interesting and fun. His belief in generating interest rather than punishing or forcing students to use English sets a tone for the school's English culture.

Mr Johnson's Pronunciation Classes

As someone responsible for the whole school's oral classes, Mr Johnson has designed an oral curriculum and a special IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) handbook for his students to use.

The video clip on the right features Mr Johnson teaching class 1A. Features worth noting are:

1. Using symbols to communicate with the students

The first thing Mr Johnson does in the lesson is to write "Good morning class... we are going to practise IPA today" in IPA symbols. Throughout the lesson, Mr Johnson communicates with the students through IPA instead of speaking. This helps students make the connection between the symbols and the spoken words.
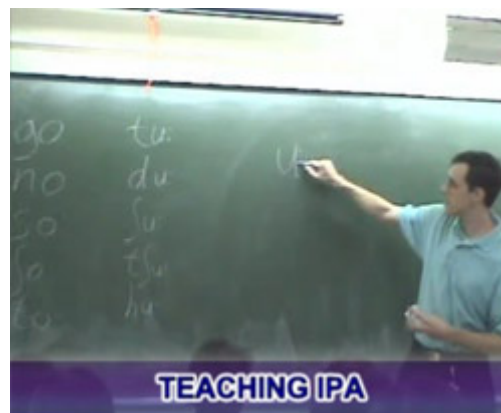
2. Scaffolding students to use the IPA symbols

In class, students move from reading the symbols as a class to being given "difficult" words to practise, and then being asked to teach other students their difficult words. These difficult words are often related to science vocabulary, in anticipation that many 1A students will end up moving into the science stream.

3. Use of school-based IPA handbook

Mr Johnson has developed an IPA handbook for YLLSS. Aside from teaching students how to use IPA and read new words, the handbook includes useful exercises, useful vocabulary and tongue twisters.

Cross-panel collaboration

Although not compulsory, many non-English language teachers have taken the initiative to participate in English activities or work with the English panel.

CROSS PANEL INVOLVEMENT

1. Participation in English Speaking Days

Despite the fact that YLLSS is a Chinese-medium school (CMI), other teachers in the school are keen to get involved in the English activities and provide support to the English Club by encouraging their students to speak English. This type of role-modelling is very popular with students, who are curious to find out how good their science or history teacher is at speaking English.

2. Practising English with their students

To the surprise of many students, one of their history teachers was "arrested" for speaking English in the corridor. She was also awarded a prize through the lucky draw during weekly assembly.

When asked how she was caught speaking English, Miss Tang explained that she wanted to help students in her form improve their English for the HKCEE. Her English-teaching colleague had suggested that she could spend a minute or so every day talking in English with her students.

3. Building students' vocabulary

In order to help students in subjects where the medium of examination is English, other subject teachers may solicit the help of the English panel. Aside from the science and maths teachers, who took the initiative to ask the NET to run a workshop for them, collaboration exists at a more informal level.

For example, Miss Zoe Chan, the English panel chair, related how the biology panel has asked the English teachers to introduce science-related vocabulary items in the junior-forms. In the NET's pronunciation classes, he deliberately chooses difficult science-related words (e.g. Fahrenheit) in order to familiarise students with them.

Miss Kit Lee joined YLLSS four years ago straight from university. Since joining the school, she has become an important member of the English panel and highly regarded by the school management, as this comment from the principal shows:

"Kit is very competent. Even if I give her less able students — those with poor results or those who lack motivation — she is able to raise them from the dead."

It was obvious at the start of the case study investigation that Miss Lee was a very talented teacher. Her teaching is underpinned by a keen attention to sequencing language input, and planning and reflection on her own teaching as well as the students' learning. She is a highly motivated teacher who is passionate about teaching and devoted to her students. In September 2004, Miss Lee was awarded a Certificate of Merit in the Chief Executive's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

In an interview with Miss Lee, she was asked why she did so much for her students and whether the additional work was stressful for her. She said that the additional work did create pressure, but that she was motivated to improve herself. She constantly strives to become a better teacher, and claims that this is deliberate:

"I am aware that I need to provide students with motivation and in turn, my students will provide me with the motivation to improve. Students are a motivation to improve."

This inner "force" that drives Miss Kit Lee to constantly evaluate her own teaching is central to her effectiveness in the classroom. She is a role model for her students and practises what she preaches. For example, Miss Lee reported early in the case study that she always looks at her lessons critically:

> "As teachers, we always ask our students to improve and work hard, but sometimes, we ourselves fail to do so."

Miss Lee's teaching is carefully planned and totally focused on the needs of her students, no matter what form she teaches. Miss Lee claims that she "evaluates the students continuously" and when asked how she does this, she reported that she takes a detailed look at their work, i.e. their tasks, compositions, oral books and in-class participation. This holistic approach to evaluating the progress of her students is done through observation of her students in and out of class.

SELF IMPROVEMENT

As well as looking at all aspects of her students' language work in and out of class, Miss Lee also pays careful attention to their reactions in class in order to assess how the lesson is received and understood. This is not simply a matter of checking whether the students are having fun. It is aimed at ensuring a positive learning outcome.

Self-evaluation has played a great part in Miss Lee's professional development. She plans her lessons by reflecting on previous lessons so that she can build on strengths and overcome weaknesses. She does not blame the *students* if learning does not take place in class. Instead, she looks at what she did or did not do.

PLANNING WITH AN AWARENESS OF HER STUDENTS' ABILITIES

Evaluating and adapting teaching strategies and classroom activities is a fundamental ingredient in the students' learning process. In class, Miss Lee makes frequent changes to activities and routines that might have already proved successful in a different context. Read more about the CLP and the vocab game here.

For example, in one S.1 lesson, Miss Lee asked the class to brainstorm vocabulary, and she wrote students' responses on the blackboard. The board was full of vocabulary and every student was involved at some point in volunteering answers. Two cycles later, Miss Lee did the same thing, but this time classified the words on the board. Students were then asked to identify different parts of speech. When asked why she had done this, Miss Lee replied that she wanted her input to be more systematic and organised. By categorising the

STUDENTS IDENTIFYING DIFFERENT PARTS OF SPEECH
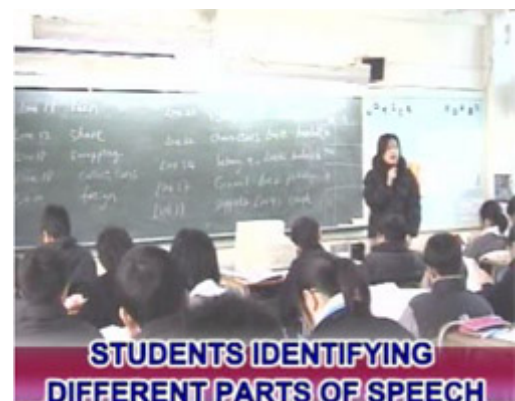
words, the students were able to identify different parts of speech.

Through critical assessment of lessons and learning, better teaching strategies emerge.

After another unit, Miss Lee prepared a set of cards for her students and divided the class in half. Each half of the class had to send a representative to the front to collect a card and then give clues to his or her team members so that they could guess the target lexical item. This activity involved processing vocabulary, offering clues using synonyms and word associations, and finally comprehension and pronunciation. If one of the teams could not guess the right answer, the question was posed to the other team. Read more about the CLP and the vocabulary game here.

At the CLP meeting a few days later, Miss Lee shared her vocabulary activity with her F.1 colleagues. Two other teachers took Miss Lee's "vocabulary game" and included it in their own teaching soon after. However, like Miss Lee, they adapted it to suit the needs of their students. Such adaptation and sharing of resources and ideas is a common feature in the S.1 panel, and Miss Lee seems empowered by it. To illustrate this point, it is worth describing the next lesson where Miss Lee used the "vocabulary game" as a consolidation activity. It was very different to the first one observed and recorded, and this stemmed from Miss Lee's reflection on the previous lessons and the nature of her students.

She wanted to involve more students, especially the quieter ones who seemed happy to allow the more confident students to take more turns in class. Miss Lee was aware of the unequal participation in her class, so she decided to adopt pair work and have the students work together. She placed weaker pupils with stronger ones.

The decision to have students work together had a positive impact on the "new" activity. For many teachers, just having students volunteer their answers would have been enough, but Miss Lee wanted the activity to include *all* students. She also modified the game to maintain students' interest.

In another lesson later in the year, Miss Lee split the class into two teams of boys and girls, which made the atmosphere very exciting. She also gave students "trump cards" that could be used to double their marks when they were really confident. At every stage of any given lesson, Miss Lee's decisions are based on observing the students and listening to their answers. The students appreciate what Miss Lee is doing because they enjoy the variety of teaching approaches employed.

Miss Lee also recycles students' target language. Over an observed period of two cycles, we observed that Miss Lee constantly reintroduces vocabulary and structures from previous lessons. This is not necessarily the result of textbook prompts, as many structures come from previous units or even years. According to Miss Lee, much of the recycling originates from instinct because she has internalised what has been done in class and what she has learnt from Collective Lesson-Planning meetings. When she plans her lessons, she combines reflection on previous lessons with her understanding of her students to work out a mental plan. However, to draw the reflective circle to a close, she is also aware of the importance of the CLP meetings in refining and finalising a teaching idea. Read more about CLP here.

Mr Chan has been teaching English at YLLSS for seven years. He used to be the English panel chair at the school.

Strong grammatical focus

Through classroom observations, interviews with students and tests administered to Mr Chan's class, it became clear that one of Mr Chan's strengths is his approach to teaching grammar. Through marking schemes and remedial classes, Mr Chan gives students as much individual attention as possible. In a larger context, the strong grammatical focus of his lessons is complemented by a strong interactive component, as well as the school's informal curriculum.

Contextualisation of grammar

In addition to teaching students how to organise grammar, Mr Chan contextualises it. For example, in one unit we observed, "Going Places" (Longman Express 2A), Mr Chan contextualised the unit by asking students to choose a place for their upcoming school picnic. By asking students to plan the picnic and justify their decision to the class, Mr Chan effectively integrated the language items (prepositions, cause/effect words) into the unit. Students were stimulated by the real-life context. On the day of the picnic, they also interviewed people at the picnic site. In essence, Mr Chan expanded on what was in the textbook in order to motivate his students.

Promoting higher-order thinking through questioning

Mr Chan's interaction with students is very lively, and students are interested because Mr Chan asks them challenging questions. Students are asked to debate moral dilemmas and to evaluate and justify their decisions. In this way, the use of the language is dynamic and creative. Students cannot resort to rote answers, and must produce answers which are personal and meaningful. The frequency of open/referential questions means that students produce a lot of language in class.

Explore further:

- A unit of material: From input to production. How Mr Chan adapted the "Going Places" unit from Longman Express 2A
- Organising the theory: How Mr Chan consolidates grammar
- Presentation: Student production of the language learnt
- Asking questions: How Mr Chan creates interest through questioning
- Student feedback: What 2B students have to say about Mr Chan's teaching

Use of a real-life context to generate interest

In the unit "Going Places" (*Longman Express 2A*), Mr Chan asked the students to plan where to go for their upcoming school picnic. The students had to figure out how to get there, the cost, and what they were going to do there. Since students were going on a school trip in the near future, the activity had a purpose.

Language input

In the first half of the cycle observed, Mr Chan concentrated on teaching the language for that unit, which included:

- Giving directions
- Prepositional phrases of time
- Connectives of reason and result (cause and effect)

As Mr Chan presented the language, he turned to real-life examples that his students could relate to. For example, to teach students how to give directions, he asked them how to get to the boys' bathroom on the 2/F, physically stepping outside the classroom and using gestures to help the students visualise the process of getting from one place to another.

Outside input

Students were asked to go away and research their chosen destination. For example, one group chose Butterfly Bay near Tuen Mun, while another chose Ocean Park. All groups were asked to do the following:

- Research the methods/costs of transport
- Find out about possible activities and plan an itinerary
- Justify their itinerary to the rest of the class

Because students were allowed to choose their destination, they were genuinely interested in the activity. This can be seen in their projects. One group, for example, wrote extensively about the exhibits in the Science Museum. What is impressive about their project is not only the length of the material, but also the fact that they attempted to digest the research and write it in their own words.

Shing Mun
Country Park

Group 2

Tammy Chan	Barbie Chan	Ricky Chan
Christy Chan	Kathy Leung	Suki Yeung

城門郊野公園
Shing Mun Country Park

郊野公園管理站
Country Park Management Centre
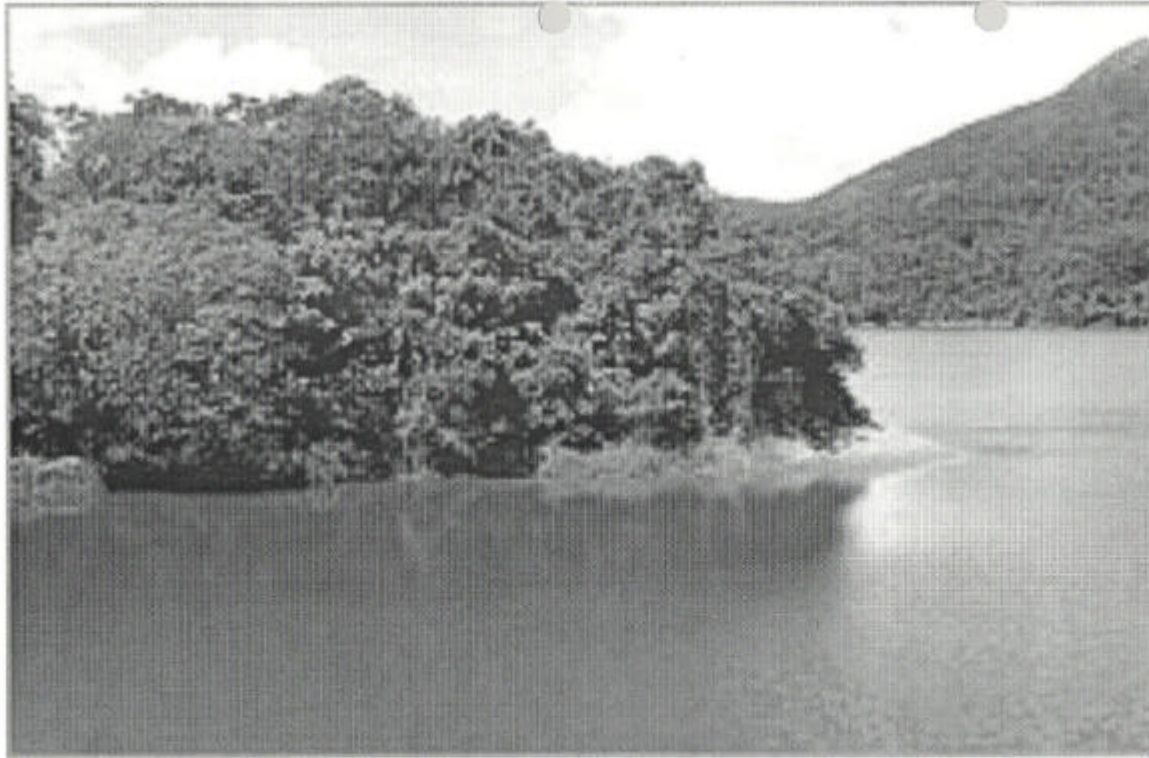
城門水塘
Shing Mun Reservoir

城門道 Shing Mun Road

梨木樹村
Lei Muk Shue Estate

Autumn is a good time to go picnic.our school also has a picnic. This year, we plan to go to Shing Mun Country Park. It is a very big and beautiful country park. We can also breathe the air.
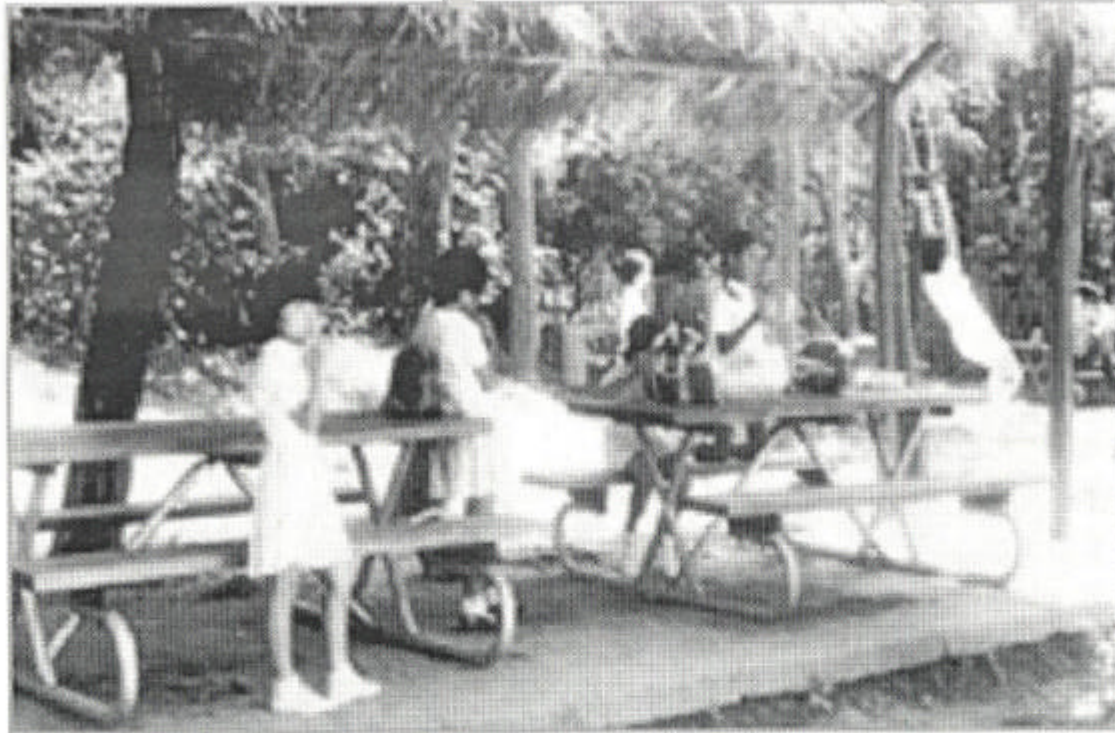
How can we get to Shing Mun country park? first., we can take the bus 69M to Tsuen Wan. It takes you 53min. It costs$9.1. Then you can take the green minibus 82 to the last stop. It takes you 10min.

We will get there at 11a.m. to 12a,m. ,we will go hiking because we should do some exercise in the morning. Lt is good to the health.

- From 2pm until 4pm, we will play some games with all the classmates and our class teacher, Mr Chan. It will be interesting. We can also make our friendship closely.

Autumn is a good time to go picnic. Our school also has a picnic. This year, we plan to go to Shing Mun Country Park. It is a very big and beautiful country park. We can also breathe the fresh air.

How can we get to Shing Mun Country Park? First, we can take the bus 69M to Tsuen Wan. It takes you 53minutes. It costs $9.1. Then you can take the green minibus 82 to the last stop. It takes you 10minutes. It costs $5. For the whole trips, it takes you 63minutes. It costs $14.1 only. It is cheap. It is not too far too.

We will get there at 11am. From 11am to 12pm, we will go hiking because we should do some exercise in the morning. It is good to the health. We will felt hungry after hiking so we will have barbecue between 12pm and 2pm. It will be our lunch. We can also talk together during barbecue. From 2pm until 4pm, we will play some games with all the classmates and our class teacher, Mr. Chan. It will be interesting. We can also make our friendship closely. At 4pm, we will go back to school as we need 1 hour to go back to school.

Since Shing Mun Country Park is a good place so I am sure this will be a wonderful picnic. I also want to invite you to join us to have fun together for our picnic!

In addition to using real-life examples to illustrate the language, Mr Chan helps students organise and remember language structures.

Using the computer

Mr Chan uses the computer - an effective teaching and learning aid - to write his notes, which are then projected onto the screen at the front of the class. There are a number of benefits to this:

USING THE COMPUTER

- The computer can be used to highlight words, move phrases around or make tables. This helps students see the connection between language items.
- Time is saved as there is no need to clean the board.
- Notes from previous lessons can be retrieved, either as quick reminder or as a framework to build upon.
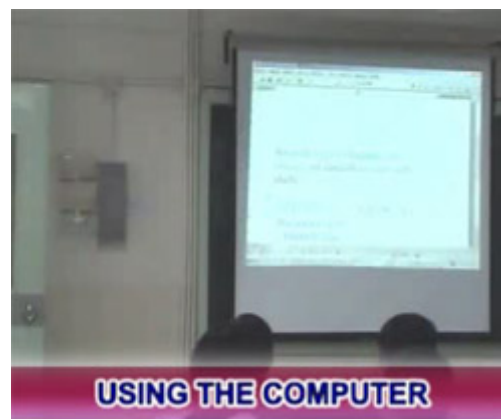
Tailor-made grammar books for students

As part of the support group, Mr Chan helped develop the school-based grammar handbook that is used at YLLSS. Mr Chan uses this grammar handbook regularly because he feels that it's more challenging for students than the textbook they use in class. Through interviews, we learned that one of Mr Chan's former students still refers to the grammar handbook and that many students at YLLSS find the handbook useful.

Marking schemes and remedial classes

Mr Chan is extremely thorough in assessing students' written work. He employs a marking scheme so that students know what type of mistake they have made and can attempt to correct it themselves. He also holds remedial classes after school to work with individual students on their grammatical mistakes. As the principal said of Mr Chan:

> "His strengths are in marking essays and compositions. His dedication in marking really moves me – after marking the compositions he doesn't just list errors on the blackboard and explain them to the class. He works with individual students after school. For every composition, every sentence, every student, he will point out their errors and explain how they can do better."

Students were then asked to present the information, which activated the language in a real and meaningful way:

- Presenting how the class would get to their chosen destination meant that students used the prepositions they had learnt to give directions (e.g. "To get **to** the Science Museum we take the 969 bus....").
- Asking students to plan an itinerary enabled them to use prepositional phrases of time (e.g. "**from** 10 o'clock to 11 o'clock...").
- Asking students to justify their itinerary meant they had to use cause and effect structures (e.g. "We can go **to** Butterfly Bay **to collect** shells")

Using group discussion in class to promote interaction and communication

By asking students to work in groups, Mr Chan was able to maximise their use of English in class. This also gave students a chance to practise the language before presenting it in front of the class. Mr Chan walked around, monitoring groups and encouraging them to think.

Following the presentations, students had the opportunity to ask each other questions. As the video clip demonstrates, the interaction between students was spontaneous. This presentation took place after the bell had rung on a Friday afternoon. Students enjoyed the discussion and were more than happy to stay and challenge each other. The types of questions students asked each other had been role-modelled by Mr Chan in class.

How might teachers encourage students to ask more "curious" questions?

- **Give students novel experiences that they can relate to.**
- **Be flexible and open to students' input.**
- **Make it the objective of the lesson to stimulate students' interest rather than to pass on information.**

Reference:

Lindfors, J. W. (1991). *Children language and learning (2nd ed.).* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO FOR YOUR PICNIC?

How About...
Hong Kong Science Museum?

天瑞/天耀/天盛/嘉	天祐苑	燈柱 AD6673 對面
TIN SHUI/TIN YIU/TIN SHIN	TIN YAU COURT	TIN FUK RD TIN YAU COURT OPP L/P AD6673 $16.5
大欖隧道 大欖隧道轉		
TAI LAM TUNNEL BUS INTERC	TAI LAM TUNNEL	TAI LAM TUNNEL TAI LAM TUNNEL INTERCHANGE $16.5
大欖隧道轉車站	大欖隧道	大欖隧道 大欖隧道轉 車站
TAI LAM TUNNEL BUS INTERC	TAI LAM TUNNEL	TAI LAM TUNNEL TAI LAM TUNNEL INTERCHANGE $16.5
尖沙咀/天星碼頭	翔道	廣東道門牌 393 號 對面
TSIM SHA TSUI/STAR FERRY	WUI CHEUNG ROAD	CANTON RD OPP HSE NO. 393 $4.2
尖沙咀/天星碼頭	柯士甸道	廣東道 廣東道官立學 校對出
TSIM SHA TSUI/STAR FERRY	AUSTIN ROAD	CANTON ROAD $4.2

About Meteorology

On the ground floor, we can learn about Meteorology. This area explains different atmospheric phenomena and provides some weather information to you. You can use your hands to separate a **tornado**.
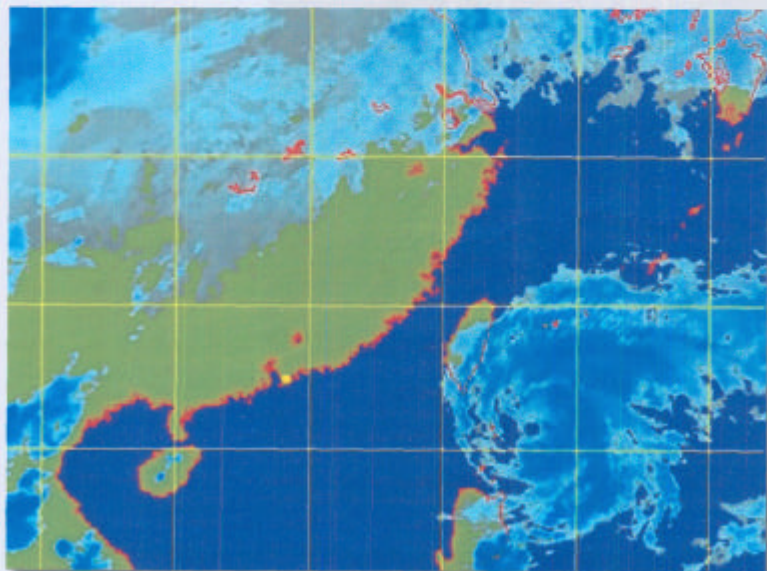

←Tornado

You can find the newest weather information by using a computer and surfing the page of the **Hong Kong Oberservatory**.

↑ Hong Kong Oberservatory ↑

On the other hand, you can look at the satellite images directly received from a **Geostationary Meteorological Satellite**. It is a very modern satellite to observe the meteorology.

About Light

There are many different kinds of applications of light and phenomena are introduced . On the **Light Bench**, you can use mirrors, lenses and prisms to do some simple experiments of light.

↑ Light Bench ↑

The **Anti-gravity** Mirror can produce an optical illusion. It seems you are floating in air.

Second Floor

About Food Science

In this area, you can know the ingredients, which are contained in food, and shows the relationship between a balanced eating habit and health. You can watch some videos in the **Process Theatre** to understand the modern production of moon cakes or ice cream. You can also choose several foods and then practice cycling in the **Food is Fuel** exhibit. You can see how much energy is spent and what the ingredients of the food are. Perhaps we can see some GM Food!

↑ Process Theatre ↑

Third Floor

←Food is Fuel

ABOUT ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We use a large amount of the limited fossil fuels. It does not only result in the resources are going to be used up; it also leads to environmental pollution. In Energy Efficiency Centre, you can learn many energy-saving tips in **Eye on Energy**.

↑ Eye on Energy ↑

Environmental problems such as global warming, air pollution and noise pollution caused by burning fossil fuels are also discussed in **The Price of Power**.   ↓ The Price of Power ↓

In addition, you can learn about the application of **Renewable Energy**. You can also find the advantages and disadvantages if we use different kinds of renewable energy, for examples, solar energy and wind energy.

↑ Renewable Energy ↑

Conclusion

This year, we would like to choose Hong Kong Science Museum for our picnic site, because we can get there easily and we do not need to spend too much money. We can learn more knowledge about science, play some games or do some experiments. For example, we can play bubble games, separate a tornado and try the multimedia computer software and the rest.

We leave at about 8:30a.m. From School, we turn right and then go straight ahead to Yiu Cheung House first. Then we go upstairs and go straight ahead. When we see the Tiu Yiu Shopping Centre, we turn left and go straight on the road continuously. Finally, we can see a bus stop at Yiu Man House and we can wait about fifteen minutes for the 269B bus. It takes about 5 minutes arrive the stop.

When we get on the bus, we have to pay sixteen dollars and fifty cents. For the whole trip, we should pay thrity-three dollars. After about ninety minutes, we can get off at Granville Road. Then we go straight ahead and reach at Hong Kong Science Museum. It takes about 5minutes. Therefore, the whole trip takes about one hour and forty minutes.

When we arrive at Hong Kong Science Museum, it is about ten fifteen a.m. On Sundays to Tuesdays, and Thursday to Saturdays, we have to pay about eighteen dollars to enter the museum. On Wednesdays it is free to enter. It is air-conditioning so we can be comfortable there. First, we can play some games about meteorology and light on ground floor from 10:15a.m. to 11:15a.m.

Then we go to the first to learn about computers. There is a Computer Laboratory. We can see the structure and applications of computers. We can also try some new software. There is voice mouse exhibit. We can speak something to control the mouse. At 12:30 p.m., we have to go to the canteen on the third floor for our lunch.

After we have finished our lunch, we have to go to interview about two visitors what they feel about this the museum. It takes about fifteen minutes to finish the interview. Then, we learn the disadvantages of consuming too much energy in The Price of Power. We can also get some tips of saving energy. We can find the advantages and disadvantages of

using renewable energy. We spend about 90 minutes here.

Finally, we can buy some souvenirs for our friends and family in the shops. We can buy some models of satellites and spaceships. We can also buy some stationery and notebooks. It takes about fifteen minutes. Then, we go back to school.

We spend about fifty dollars for the whole trip for each person, except the souvenirs. It is very cheap for picnic and we can learn more about science. Therefore, Hong Kong Science Museum is a good picnic site for us to choose. Let join us!

The success of Mr Chan's teaching can be seen from the feedback of his students. Students were able to articulate what they had learnt and why they think Mr Chan is a good English teacher. Extracts from interviews with students can be seen in the video.

1. Students are very clear about the grammatical goals of the material

One might expect that given the real-life context and interactivity, students might easily forget the grammatical points of the lesson. However, in an interview conducted a few months later, students were asked what they had learnt in the unit, "Going Places". The first thing that they mentioned was the grammatical goal of the lesson, "Cause and effect." This shows that they had retained information from lessons taught months earlier.

2. Students report learning communication skills

Aside from the grammatical goal, students reported improved communication skills. More specifically, they learned the following:

- How to conduct interviews
- How to present a report to classmates
- How to solve problems (e.g. finding information and interviewing strangers who don't want to be interviewed)
- How to work as a group and "develop friendships"

In order to make themselves understood, students need to have not only a grammatical grasp of a sentence but also the confidence to express themselves, a knowledge of the proper form of expression, the ability to adapt their language and the ability to work with other people.

3. Students demonstrate an ability to analyse Mr Chan's teaching strategies

When interviewing Mr Chan's students, one thing that struck the interviewer was not only the students' confidence but also the fact that they could easily articulate and reflect on Mr Chan's teaching. When asked why Mr Chan was a good English teacher, students mentioned that he was able to do the following:

- Provide knowledge and examples outside the textbook
- Emphasise important aspects of the language
- Organise the material with the use of tables, symbols, mind-maps and the computer (to help students remember the material)
- Contextualise the material and make it relevant to students' lives (which made it easier to remember)