

Acknowledgements

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Report on Language Enhancement Measures for Young Children (Phase I Tryout)

Background

This initial study is conducted in response to an ECR6 recommendation for helping young children who cannot cope with learning English and to prevent their developing a sense of failure.

2. An ad hoc working group made up of school heads and teachers, a senior lecturer from the HKIEd, an educational psychologist from the Services Division and subject specialists from the English Section of CDI, was formed in May 1998 to take on the task.

Aim

3. To develop and promote effective strategies and activities in the teaching of English to young children in order to enhance their skills and interest in learning English and to prevent their developing a sense of failure at an early stage of schooling.

Tryout

4. After a review of the literature, some discussions with the professionals and an analysis of children's performance, two sets of language enhancement measures for preventive and intervention purposes were designed. They were developed on the learning principle that young children do not respond to language as a formal system but as a means for communication, enjoyment and fun.
5. The measures were tried out in two primary schools between June and December 1998. A total of 144 children from four classes of P1 to P3 and four English remedial groups were involved.

Findings

6. Learners' improvements were noted in the following five areas:

(A) Attitudes towards learning English

The learners had a more positive attitude towards learning English after the Tryout. They reported that they felt happy when they read, wrote, spoke, and

listened to English. They particularly liked singing songs and playing games in the target language.

(B) Book concepts, reading strategies, and print and word awareness

At the end of the Tryout, more learners were able to

- hold books correctly,
- turn pages in sequence,
- identify the title and author of books, and
- use page numbers.

There were also improvements in the use of reading strategies, with more learners being able to

- use picture clues to get the story line,
- make predictions,
- use pictures to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words,
- use personal experience and prior knowledge to construct meaning,
- use letter-sound knowledge, and
- self-correct while reading aloud.

Improvements were also observed in the learners' print and word awareness.

After the Tryout, more learners were able to

- use appropriate directionality when reading English,
- understand the concept of letter, word and sentence,
- associate sounds with letters, and
- recognize the functions of punctuation.

(C) Phonological awareness

On the whole, the learners' phonological awareness was raised. This was shown by their better performance to relate letters to sounds at the end of the Tryout. Specifically, more learners were able to pronounce accurately all the five target vowel sounds and eight out of the ten target consonant sounds.

(D) Oral language behaviours

The learners made marked improvements in using gestures, tone, stress and rhythm when reading a story aloud. There was also an increase in the number of learners who were able to follow simple instructions in English after the Tryout.

(E) Learning strategies

The learners interviewed reported that they had learned some useful strategies after the Tryout. Instead of learning words by copying them many times, they had learned how to break words into small parts and relate sounds to spelling. Instead of relying on the written form only, they could also name an object in English after handling the real objects or models.

7. Teachers' feedback showed that the language enhancement measures were useful.

(A) Effectiveness of activities

Upon completion of the Tryout, teachers rated most of the activities as very effective or effective. A few activities (e.g. singing songs) were given a lower rating by one teacher but her learners actually said they liked them when they were interviewed.

(B) Recommendations to other teachers

The teachers reported unanimously that they would recommend most of the teaching activities to other teachers of English.

8. Tryout schools reflect confidence in using the language enhancement measures to improve their students' learning.

(A) One of the teachers commented that teachers in her school were more confident with the use of shared reading and phonics after the Tryout. They had successfully applied for a grant from the Quality Education Fund to employ native English speaking teachers to run an English enrichment programme during the 1999-2000 school year.

(B) The other school commenced a programme on shared reading with the Tryout classes immediately after the Tryout in the school year 1998-99 and has continued until the present time.

The way forward

9. The findings of the Tryout are positive and encouraging. After the necessary modifications have been made, schools would be invited to take part in the second phase of the Tryout so that eventually more learners, teachers and schools would benefit from the language enhancement measures developed.

English Section
Education Department
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**Ad Hoc Working Group on the Development of
Language Enhancement Measures for Young Children
(Phase I Tryout)**

Membership list

Chairperson	Ms CHAN Wai-ming Principal Curriculum Development Officer (English) English Section, Curriculum Development Institute Education Department
Secretary	Mrs. Rosana CHONG CHEUNG Wai-mun Curriculum Development Officer (English) English Section, Curriculum Development Institute Education Department
Members	Ms Mary CHEUNG Headmistress TWGHs Kwan Kai Ming Primary School Mrs. Jasmine LAI (from 5 May 1998 to 4 May 1999) Specialist (Educational Psychology/Professional Support) Services Division Education Department Ms LAU Oi-man Teacher CUHKFAA Thomas Cheung Primary School Mr. LEUNG Moon-wing Headmaster CUHKFAA Thomas Cheung Primary School Mrs. Selina LO (from 5 May 1999) Specialist (Educational Psychology/Professional Support) Services Division Education Department Ms NG Fung-ling Teacher TWGHs Kwan Kai Ming Primary School Mrs. TSE TSO Yuk-wah Senior Lecturer Department of English The Hong Kong Institute of Education

**Ad Hoc Working Group on the Development of
Language Enhancement Measures for Young Children
(Phase II Tryout)**

Membership list

Chairperson	Ms CHAN Wai-ming Chief Curriculum Development Officer (English) English Section Education Department
Secretary	Mrs. Rosana CHONG CHEUNG Wai-mun Curriculum Development Officer (English) English Section Education Department
Members	Ms FUNG Sau-tak Teacher Lok Sin Tong Lau Tak Primary School AM Mr. HUNG Kui-ling Headmaster Lok Sin Tong Lau Tak Primary School AM Ms LAM Cho-wai, Emily Teacher Tin Shui Wai Methodist Primary School Mr. LEUNG Hing-wun Headmaster Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) PM Ms LEUNG Yin-mei, Winnie Teacher Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) PM Mrs. Selina LO Specialist (Educational Psychology/Professional Support) Services Division Education Department Mr. SO Ping-fai Headmaster Tin Shui Wai Methodist Primary School Mrs. TSE TSO Yuk-wah Senior Lecturer Department of English The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Language Learning Activities

Web Site	URL
A Base for English Word Games	http://www.edgamesandart.com
Between the Lions home page	http://pbs.org/wgbh/lions/
Children's BBC	http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc
Cross Words and Other Word Games	http://syndicate.com/crossword.html
FunBrain.com Grammar Gorillas	http://www.funbrain.com
KidsCom: Hangman	http://www.kidscom.com/orakac/games/hangman/hangmanright.html
Kids Domain Online Games	http://www.kidsdomain.com/games/index.html
PrimaryGames.com Language Art Games	http://www.primarygames.com/reading.htm
Seussville Games	http://www.randomhouse.com/seussville/games
Web Word Find Puzzles	http://www.eduplace.com/kids/games/wwf/index.html
Wordland	http://www.etymologic.com/

Shared Reading

Web Site	URL
Candlelight Stories Kids Zone	http://www.candlelightstories.com/morekids.asp
Children's storybooks online	http://www.magickeys.com/books/index.html
Children's media - Scholastic	http://www.scholastic.com
CNN Interactive Learning Resources	http://literacynet.org/cnnsf
Funny Poetry for Children	http://www.meadowbrookpress.com/Poetry/index.cfm
Language Arts - Yahoooligans	http://www.yahoooligans.com/School_Bell/Language_Arts/
Poetry for Children	http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/poechild.htm
Semantic Rhyming Dictionary	http://www.link.cs.cmu.edu/dougb/rhyme-doc.html
Sunshine Online (shared reading)	http://www.literacyhour.co.uk

Phonological Awareness

Web Site	URL
BBC Education - Words and Pictures	http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/wordsandpictures/phonics.html

Consonant Sound Phonics Index	http://www.tampareads.com/phonics/whereis/index.htm
Phonics in Whole Language Classroom (ERIC)	http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed372375.html
School Express	http://www.schooexpress.com
S.C.O.R.E. Language Arts - Phonic Links	http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/Phonics_Link/phonics.html
Teach Reading with Phonics	http://www.yesphonics.com