

Preface

This book of the gifted programme, *Debating Out of the Box*, is the outcome of the collaboration between the Gifted Education Section, Curriculum Development Institute, Education Bureau, and the teachers of two secondary schools to facilitate the English language learning and teaching for high ability students in 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. With this book, we aim to provide secondary schools with suggestions on how to design, implement and evaluate enrichment activities or language programmes for gifted learners of English in a pull-out setting and in the regular classroom.

Background of this Book

As recommended in the *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4 – 6) 2007*, teachers should introduce to students the format and principles of debating to enhance their presentation, argumentation, critical thinking, collaboration and information skills. As they are familiarised with the skills and knowledge necessary for using English language as a tool in various cognitive processes, such as, generating, researching and applying ideas in debating, students' world knowledge and self-confidence will then be developed.

Aims of this Book

As Betts (1985) pointed out, 'Once they have acquired the critical independent strategies, gifted students are able to become lifelong learners, capable of responsible involvement and leadership in a changing world'.

When compared to learning styles of average students, gifted students are more inclined to learn with a higher sense of motivation with instructional strategies that emphasise independence, such as, independent study and discussion. However, while gifted students like these methods, they do not always have the necessary skills that are essential to self-directed learning; consequently, they need to learn the skills.

On top of the skills and knowledge introduced by the English debating elective module, **gifted students with intellectual and linguistic precocity should be given opportunities, as their peers do, to learn through instructional scaffolding.** Instead of learning the knowledge in one single, didactic way, **gifted students should be encouraged to connect concepts, principles and skills through complex**

applications to suit diverse purposes. They will then be able to be engaged in the challenges where they can learn how to construct knowledge and respond to the needs of different situations as **autonomous learners** who will use the knowledge and strategies acquired to achieve their goals.

As the title of this programme suggests, Debating Out of the Box, thereafter called DOB, is a programme that aims to encourage gifted students to think, argue, rebut and speak in a non-conformal, creative yet persuasive manner. **Debating can be regarded as a puzzle. Gifted students can explore numerous concepts and perspectives in the debating context, and use them to define and solve ambiguities in definition, language, and logic reasoning before they produce a sound, persuasive speech in a specific role in a debate.** With the activities and tasks specially designed based on Paul's Elements of Reasoning (1992) in the programme, gifted learners of English will have the opportunities to think 'out of the box'. They will be able to debate in favour of or against a standpoint with well-reasoned argument and informed judgment, along with the established structure and rules of debating. **The ultimate goal is to help students think and make judgment whenever they are interested in checking the quality of reasoning about a problem, issue, or situation based on a model or framework, such as, the universal intellectual standards from Paul's Elements of Reasoning. The skills and attitudes necessary for becoming a self-directed learner can consequently be built in the students. Gifted students will later be able to apply the skills to all areas of the curriculum.**

This book starts with a description of the piloted programme, Debating Out of the Box, in the participating schools in 2009 and 2010. The selection procedure adopted to place students in the programme, lessons plans, learning and teaching materials with highlights of gifted education considerations, recommendations for use in the regular classroom, and remarks on programme evaluation are all included for teachers' reference.

The suggested materials and activities in the book aim to engage students in games, discussions, free expression of personal responses, and peer and self-reflection. In any case, teachers are welcome to use and adapt the materials and activities to suit the abilities, needs and interests of students.

We welcome feedback and suggestions from teachers who tried out the activities with their students. Comments and suggestions can be sent to the Chief Curriculum Development Officer, Gifted Education Section, Education Bureau, Rm E328, 3/F,

Kowloon Tong Education Services Centre, 19 Suffolk Road, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong, by e-mail to gifted@edb.gov.hk or by facsimile on 2490 6858.

For further enquiries about the activities and materials from this book, please contact Ms Dorothy LI Wing-sze, Curriculum Development Officer in the Gifted Education Section, on 3698 3476 or 3698 3472.