

Title: Connecting Classroom Learning to the Real World through Blended Learning and Innovative Life-wide Learning (Key Stage 2)

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Introduction

COVID-19 disrupted education in many aspects. Learning and teaching has never been the same. To make learning meaningful and engaging in the new normal, teachers in SKH Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School tried interesting and innovative ways to invigorate student learning. On-line virtual visits, blended learning and life-wide learning have been some of the features of its English Language curriculum.

Learning during COVID-19

According to the latest Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council 課程發展議, 2022), Hong Kong schools should work towards the updated 7 learning goals. Life-wide learning is one of the 7 learning goals to achieve whole-person development for primary school students. The Guide elucidates that through first-hand experience outside the classroom, students have opportunities to understand themselves, explore their interests and unleash their potential (Chapter 8, P.4). Students who have richer learning experiences would have broader perspectives and more positive attitudes towards life.

Implementing out-of-class life-wide learning under the pandemic was almost impossible. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Hong Kong hard in 2020, students could not even go to school and thus, all life-wide learning outside the classroom was out of the question. Teachers had to stretch their professionalism and creativity in using different pedagogies and resources to engage students in learning through different e-tools. As such, teachers of SKH Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School thought of a virtual visit allowing students to study historic buildings in an immersive way and understand village cultures in their neighborhood of Tin Shui Wai.

At the next stage of the pandemic, students could go to school but learning outside had to be limited to very small groups. Teachers of SKH Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School maximised the chance

of learning through creative blending out-of-school explorations with learning inside the School. While all students had chances to do online research and produced multi-modal texts about Hong Kong attractions, some small groups of students ventured out to have on-site visits which they would report to all students later on.

At the last stage of the pandemic, all students could go to schools and visits were allowed on a larger scale. The School took prompt actions to incorporate a life-wide learning experience for students to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in the hope that students could have an in-depth exploration of the life of Bruce Lee as part of the learning module of ‘Fantastic People in the World’.

The following is a detailed account of the experience.

Life-wide learning 1: Incorporating a virtual visit to Ping Shan Heritage Trail (屏山文物徑) in the module ‘Old Hong Kong’

For the topic ‘Old Hong Kong’, students’ knowledge of Hong Kong history and culture was extended through cross-curricular experience, virtual learning and values education. In the Chinese Language lessons, students read books about old Hong Kong. For English Language learning, teachers immersed students in virtual life-wide learning to help them understand their neighborhood in Tin Shui Wai and Chinese village culture on top of reading books about activities in the past. The virtual visit to Ping Shan Heritage trail was made possible using 360° photos, Google Maps and Green Screen technology. Through the virtual visits to two attractions along the Heritage Trail, including Tang Ancestral Hall (鄧氏宗祠) and Kun Ting Study Hall (觀廷書室), students could see the design and decoration of the buildings in a very immersive way when teachers moved the image around in many directions.

The visit to the Tang Ancestral Hall was a good way for students to appreciate the Chinese tradition of attaching importance to family bonding. Chinese people paid respect to their ancestors in the ancestral hall which was a central place for family gatherings and union. The virtual tour which enabled students to see enlarged pictures of the old buildings and classrooms was a window to understanding facilities, design and life in the past. During the online lessons, students were shown pictures of Hong Kong village people sharing and enjoying Poon Choi (盆菜), a Chinese festival meal composed of several layers of food. The special design of the Tang Ancestral Hall with red bricks on the floor inspired students to understand messages embodied in Chinese architecture.

Additionally, the virtual visit provided a good chance for values education. Through the 360° pictures, students visualised very clearly classrooms now and then. Teachers’ deliberate comparison and discussion of the facilities, such as air-conditioning, computers and lighting, enabled students to understand how blessed they are being able to study in modern classrooms.

Students' learning of 'Old Hong Kong' was further consolidated through the persuasive writing of 'Is life better now or was life better in the past?' Through reading materials, close observation of old buildings in the virtual visit, discussion of old and modern classrooms and analysis the of activities in the past, students were able to express their opinions on the writing topic using the Opinion, Reason, Explanation and Opinion (OREO) framework. Below are two pieces of students' work showing students' understanding of life in the past and present and students' opinions.

Life was better in the past

Our life is very different from the days in 1960s. We enjoy the games we play. Here I will tell you why life was better in the past.

Firstly, schools in the past were better. **We could play games with our classmates in the playground.** There were a lot of game facilities in the playground.

Second, the games were better in the past. We could play game cards, chess, marbles and skittles with our friends in the past. **We did not need to spend a lot to play the games in the past.** I strongly believe that life was better in the past.

In the past, we could play games with our friends. Also, we could **have time to play and meet our friends.** To conclude, life was better in the past.

Life is better now

Our life is very different from the days in 1970s. We enjoy the convenience technology brings us. **Here I will tell you why life is better now.**

Firstly, schools are better now. **The schools are bigger and cleaner now.** Also, **there are different subjects that students can study.**

Secondly, **the games are better now.** We can play many online games at home. Also, the games are fun and more interesting now. **Furthermore, we can play at anytime and anywhere.** I strongly believe that life is better now.

Nowadays, we can play a lot of online games with friends. Also, the schools are bigger and cleaner. All in all, life is better now.

Figure 1: Students' persuasive writing on 'Is life better now or was life better in the past?'

Life-wide learning 2: Creating e-brochures to introduce Hong Kong attractions

Under the impact of COVID-19, only small groups of people could gather for the purposes of maintaining social distancing. Teachers were not dampened by the situation. Instead, they turned this into a new learning and teaching experience. Teachers maximised the limited socialising opportunity for all P.4 students on the topic of ‘Having fun in Hong Kong’. They initiated a creative blended learning task for which students had to design e-brochures of Hong Kong attractions using Google Slides. The e-brochures were then shared online and evaluated by teachers and schoolmates. The most exciting part of the experience was when the winning group in each class could take teachers to real tours in person based on the itinerary they designed.

When face-to-face collaboration is not possible, communication through e-tools becomes essential. During the pandemic, the collaboration among students was made possible through online collaborative e-tools. ‘Google Slides’ is one of them. To facilitate effective online group work, students were guided how to work in solidarity. Students learned how to ‘divide responsibilities’, ‘have good planning and preparation’ and ‘maintain group interaction’. Teachers found these tips helpful to facilitate online co-working. As students were given the autonomy to choose Hong Kong attractions, they were very excited to complete the task using the language of giving directions and a range of adjectives to describe different places. Students created different kinds of tours, such as local eco tours, historical tours and art tours.

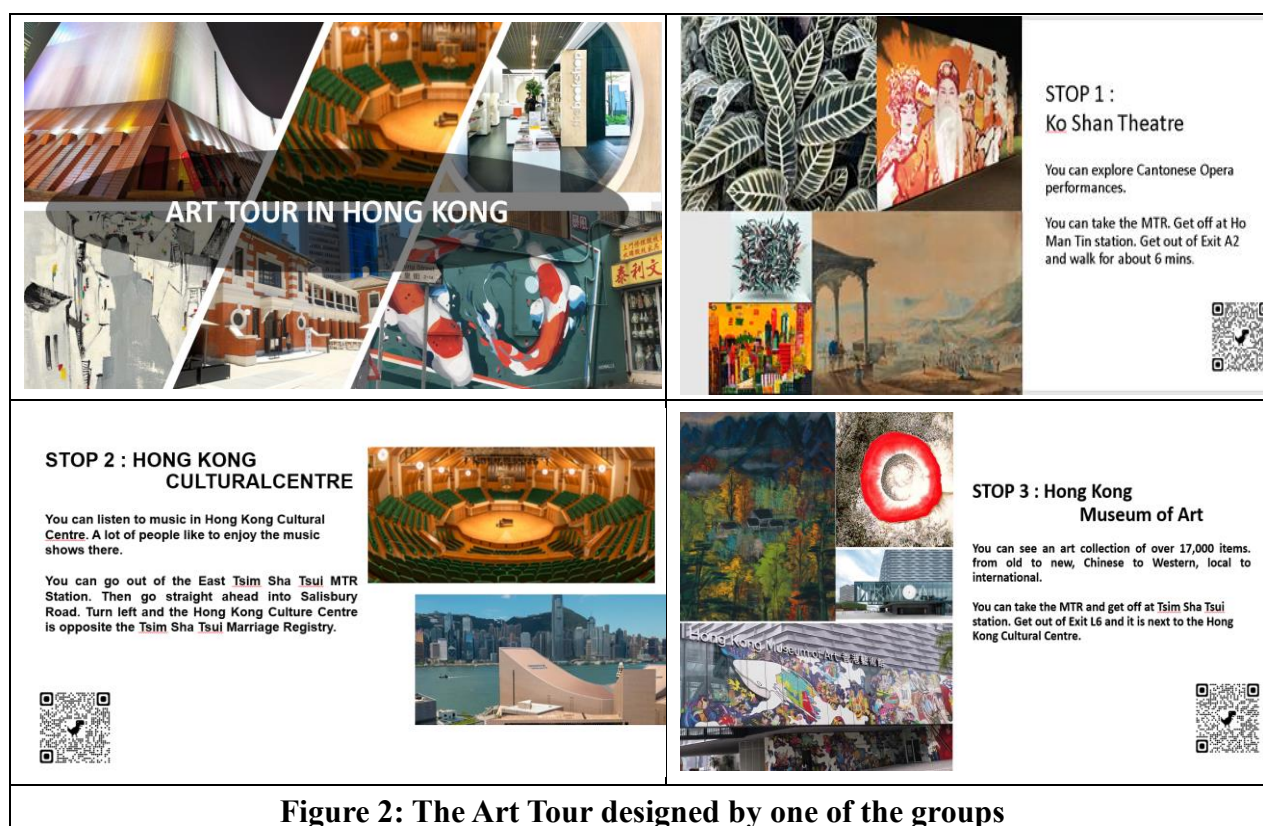


Figure 2: The Art Tour designed by one of the groups

Once the e-brochures were completed, the e-tool Padlet provided a very convenient platform for teachers and students to share ideas and give feedback to one another. The platform enabled students to see each other's good work, as well as to give positive comments and encouragement. Teachers witnessed the robust communication between students with the ease of using online platforms. After selecting the winning group in each class, students, in a small group, took teachers to different places in Hong Kong to try out the itinerary they designed. Students took teachers to take different transportation, showed teachers the characteristics and beauty of the scenic spots, and communicated with group mates, people they met and teachers in English. Subsequently, students created multi-modal texts, be they ppt slides or vlog clips, to introduce their itinerary to schoolmates who did not have a chance to leave the School to put their itinerary into practice.

This blended learning project was a highly fruitful experience for all students. The experience catered for learners' interests and abilities through different e-learning tasks such as collaboration on e-platforms and production of multi-modal texts before and after the trip. The project was also an authentic experience allowing students to execute their plans in real life, interact with people they met and lead teachers to explore Hong Kong attractions.



Figure 3: Students took ownership of the experiential learning. They showed teachers the way to an attraction.

Life-wide learning 3: Visiting the Hong Kong Heritage Museum to understand Bruce Lee's life

Reading about real life events of a successful or remarkable person often influences and inspires students. When students learn about the difficulties that others have overcome, they can make connections to their own lives. While preparing for the Module 'Fantastic People in the World', SKH Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School teachers believed that Hong Kong icons for which students can relate to can be more inspiring and meaningful to students. Accordingly, students were provided with chances to read about the Hong Kong legend in martial arts, Bruce Lee, in a biography picture book. The reading enabled students understand the growth of the Bruce Lee in Hong Kong and the United States, the challenges he faced as a teenager, his efforts in blending different styles of Chinese martial art to create his own combat method, Jeet Kune Do (截拳道), and his beliefs of life. Students' understanding of Bruce Lee was further enriched through watching his videos and trailer of films on Youtube. Students were excited to see that Bruce Lee spoke English fluently in his audition for roles in movies in the 1960s.

Understanding that deep learning would require cognitive engagement as well as sensorial experience, teachers arranged a visit to The Hong Kong Heritage Museum's exhibition 'A Man Beyond the Ordinary: Bruce Lee' to allow students to understand Bruce Lee from different perspectives through interactions with the museum settings and objects. As Shaffer (2018, P.45) points out that objects in museums provide ways of making meaning. Objects enable students to have in-depth explorations into a person or an event. The Museum helped the students to imagine and understand the historical context in which Bruce Lee lived. For example, a pair of broken glasses that Bruce Lee used for self-motivation told students how Bruce encouraged himself to make progress even though he was very poor.

Additionally, through careful planning of the visit, students learned meaningful quotes from Bruce Lee in the Museum through a 'Quote Hunting' task. Teachers hoped that the meaningful quotes from Bruce Lee could give students some inspiration on ways to deal with challenges in life. Some famous quotes from Bruce Lee which could make substantial impact on students' life are:

- Mistakes are forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them.
- I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once. But I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.
- Learning is a constant process of discovery- a process without end.
- Success is a journey not a destination. Have faith in your ability. You will just do fine.

Teachers reported that the whole process of learning about Bruce Lee went very deep in students' minds in terms of cognitive and psychological impact. Bruce Lee's biography gave students a

longitudinal review of the growth of a remarkable person. The visit to the Museum added multiple perspectives and layers to understand Bruce Lee through real objects, the display of his philosophy of life, films and recorded interviews.



When the pace of change in society is accelerating, be it a result of nature's development or human achievements, teachers need to integrate professional knowledge, creativity and transformative information technology to keep students' learning in sync with global demand and societal needs. The three examples above of bridging classroom learning with the real world using e-learning and life-wide learning have testified teachers' creativity in making learning meaningful and purposeful for students.

References:

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