NET
SCHEME NEWS

Communities of Practice:

Fostering Collaboration and Innovation

Contents

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

For over two decades, the NET Section has dedicated itself to collaborative partnerships with English educators across Hong Kong and it has been at the forefront of professional support for schools. In pursuit of a collective goal, our team of Advisory Teachers and Regional NET Coordinators collaborate with NETs, local English teachers and professional partners from different fields to support English language education in Hong Kong.

As we move into the 2024/25 school year, we are excited to expand our Learning Hub support services, aligning them closely with the latest curriculum initiatives to continue to nurture communities of collaborative and reflective practice.

Communities of practice are crucial in fostering a culture of continuous professional development among educators. By participating in these learning communities, teachers engage in a cycle of learning, experimenting, reflecting and sharing. The NET Section is committed to providing such networks and professional input to foster teachers' growth. We aim to make our Learning Hubs a fertile ground for teachers to exchange insights and enhance their pedagogical skills.

This edition of our newsletter provides a window into how the NET Scheme has been fostering collaboration, embracing innovation and enriching the language learning environment for our students. Discover how

our PDNETwork platform facilitates collaborative and reflective learning for teachers. Highlighting the success of the 'Speak 2 Write' and 'Thinking Routines' "Seed" projects, we showcase the tangible benefits of collaborative educational environments. Additionally, our Story to Stage Puppetry Competition and the Speak Up - Act Out Drama Competition illustrate our commitment to nurturing students' language skills through theatrical engagement. Insights from our pilot Literacy and e-Learning Hubs in the 2023/24 school year feature a range of professional development activities that have yielded fruitful outcomes. The articles capture the rewarding learning journeys that students take, for example, when joining a public speaking competition and a cooking competition conducted in two schools, providing insights into creating a dynamic language learning environment.

Our vision extends beyond academic achievement. We aim to foster holistic educational experiences that place students at the heart of all endeavors. The vibrant and creative multicultural team of colleagues at the NET Section will continue to collaborate with schools to drive innovation in English education.

As we look forward to another rewarding school year, we invite all of you to participate in our competitions, workshops, and Learning Hubs. Stay tuned for our new and long-anticipated initiative: the Once Upon a Book Storytelling Competition, set to be launched in October 2024. This competition promises to captivate and inspire, as it encourages students to share the joy of reading in creative and engaging ways. Together, let us continue to refine our craft and build a future where every learner thrives.

Jenny Yeung,
Chief Curriculum Development Officer
NET Section

How PDNETwork Assists Learning Communities

In education, we often hear the terms "communities of practice" and "learning communities". What do these terms mean? And how does a solo experience, such as completing an online workshop, support that?

The NET Section offers many forms of professional development (PD) for teachers. Its PDNETwork [*https://nets-pd.edb.edcity.hk/*] platform offers online workshops, which teachers can complete in their own time and pace. Yet this seems a very solo experience. How does that align with learning communities and communities of practice?

What are learning communities?

Learning communities are communities of practice. This **team-based** approach to professional learning is strongly focused on **real-life challenges** and practice through **collaborative learning**. The learning community goes beyond sharing materials or experiences. Communities of practice are described as groups where members share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better by taking **collective responsibility** as they interact regularly.

A learning community of practice might be a team within a school, or it may be a group of practitioners from across settings. This community comes together in various ways (face-to-face, online or both), to explore interests, challenges and concerns to create shared meaning.

• Together, they reflect on their beliefs, values, understandings and practices that may assist or inhibit solutions.

• Together, they explore uncertainties and complexities, and seek ideas and solutions from professional sources and dialogue.

• Together, they agree to try new practices and gather data.

• And together, they share their experiences and outcomes, and evaluate these.

It is a process of **continuous learning** for **pedagogical improvement**.

Inherent in the process is **reflective practice**, which involves meaningful self-inquiry of one's own competencies and situational context . Reflection is the first step in this "experiential learning cycle". Gathering evidence is key. Framed as "visible learning", teachers use **evidence** to evaluate their own teaching and change their practice in response.

PDNETwork and learning communities

Between these "together" experiences, learners engage in individual experiences, online learning being one example. Yet, it must be emphasised that "a website in itself is not a community of practice". So, how does PDNETwork create collaborative and reflective learning experiences to build a culture of continuous learning and improvement?

A NET Section study found that, while teachers ("learners") were engaged in a solo activity online, a collaboration was evolving through the mentor-learner (advisory teacher-teacher) process, including the online workshops' iterative feedback-chat function. Also, some teachers in schools complete online workshops together, and many use the workshops as part of a bigger school strategy to improve an aspect of their curriculum or practice.

The study also showed that learners appreciated PDNETwork's use of exemplar practices from other Hong Kong schools, something that teachers rated in the 2019 COTAP report as desired but not common in PD.

In particular, PDNETwork workshops are designed to encourage self-reflective practice through the use of reflection questions (before, during and after the learning), learning journals, KWL charts, analysis of samples and practice, and action research graphic organisers.

PDNETwork and learning hubs

The NET Section's learning hub model aims to build communities of collaborative, reflective practice. PDNETwork offers parallel PD experiences for teachers to develop skills and knowledge that inspire ideas and solutions, which they bring to their learning hub community.

The following case studies show how PDNETwork has facilitated learning communities, within a school and across schools, who share professional challenges.

Could online learning and learning communities transform your practice?

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Case study 1 : A learning community within a school

Shared challenge: How to match students to book levels

The role of PDNETwork: Teachers developed some shared knowledge through PDNETwork, before coming together with their Advisory Teacher (AT) for context-specific learning and problem-solving.

AT: In SKH Tsing Yi Estate Ho Chak Wan Primary School, we encouraged the teachers to learn how to match students to book levels as assessment for the reading programme. I proposed that all teachers do the online workshop to get a general understanding, and this would be followed by a school-based workshop.

EPC: PDNETwork helped us achieve our goal in a timely way. The two workshops (one online and one school-based) complemented each other. The online workshop acted as a good lead-in to our experienced and novice teachers. In the online workshop, we acquired the basic terminology and the procedure of matching students. In the school-based workshop, our AT reminded us of some key concepts in matching students. More importantly, we had a hands-on experience in doing a mock matching with our teachers which definitely deepened our understanding in matching students to book levels.

Shared challenge: Updating a school phonics programme

The role of PDNETwork: Teachers developed shared knowledge on the latest phonics approach to ease the development of a new programme.

AT: The principal at the school wanted to revise the school phonics program from P1 to P6. The AT suggested all teachers experience the two online workshops on phonics to develop a shared understanding of the latest thinking and gain practical examples on how to teach phonics effectively. The EPC and PSM CD completed the workshops first, followed by all the teachers by the end of term. This greatly informed how they went about revising their phonics programme.

EPC: During the pandemic, it has given teachers more time to reflect and complete the PDNETwork workshops such as phonological awareness. This workshop has equipped English teachers better, provided more knowledge and increased confidence to teach phonics.

One of the positive consequences of everyone completing phonics workshops at the school was how teachers became aware of what was available and the ease with which they could gain PD hours. Our teachers completed 34 workshops in the 2021/22 school year.

Shared challenge: How to teach guided reading to cater for learner diversity

The role of PDNETwork: Teachers were preparing to resume face-to-face guided reading after the pandemic. Some teachers were new to guided reading, while others needed a refresher after three years of no small group teaching in classrooms. Teachers were unable to gather at a CPD workshop, where there would normally be an opportunity for questions and problem-solving.

31 teachers completed the online PDNETwork workshop on guided reading. Then, they identified their unique needs through a questionnaire and were offered a choice of small-group webinar. The webinars were facilitated by the AT who offered strategies for consideration and guided participants' professional dialogue. Groups were then connected so as to continue their learning through a mutual community.

"

AT: This was the first time we offered CPD through PDNETwork. It was really important, however, that participants were able to talk about their issues and get support in seeking strategies and advice that would help them solve challenges in their unique setting, or were suited to their level of experience. In the post-online workshop questionnaire, teachers fell into three groups: novice, experienced, and confident. Each group shared common challenges, so the beauty of the post-workshop webinars was that the participants could explore their concerns and goals with others in a similar situation. As I offered tips or advice, further questions and conversation emerged. So, the participants could fully explore solutions and associated implications tailored to them.

Learner feedback: "Good revision and the discussion cleared my misconception on guided reading."

"I enjoyed this PD as it offered a chance to revisit the basics of guided reading. The webinar allowed me to analyse the differences between how we run GR lessons at our school compared to some other schools. I believe it will be helpful also in how I will set up the self-management activities groups for next year too."

"The guided reading CPD was useful to me as it has been a while since we were able to do guided reading. Establishing routines will be helpful to classroom management, and the phonics parts of the demonstration videos are a useful reminder in how to lead students to recognise strategies they themselves use to help read the word. In the webinar, I liked the chance to discuss how we can conduct guided reading in classrooms with students sitting at their chairs as I've attempted it a couple times but it did not go so well."

"I never thought there would be special ways to help the high ability readers but I have more to work with now. I'm also interested in keeping in touch with others about what strategies are working for them so I can keep refining my programme."

"

Michele Davis, Advisory Teacher and PDNETwork Coordinator
NET Section

Fostering Collaborative Learning: The Power of Communities of Practice in Education through Learning Hubs (LH)

Together, let us embrace collaboration and innovation, and strive for excellence in education!

In the ever-evolving world of education, the importance of continuous professional development and the sharing of innovative teaching practices cannot be overstated. This year, the NET Section's dedication to enhancing learning and teaching has been exemplified through the establishment of various modes of Learning Hubs (LH) in the form of Communities of Practice (CoP) for educators.

Through the CoP initiative, educators are given a platform to come together, share their experiences, and explore innovative solutions to the evolving needs of learners. These collaborative spaces foster a culture of continuous learning, where teachers can learn from their peers' successes and missteps, and adapt their methods accordingly. By nurturing a collaborative and innovative spirit among teachers, we would like to introduce new ways to foster learning and teaching.

The learning community for the 2023/24 school year focused on Literacy Development and e-Learning. Two CoP modes — a seminar for Literacy in March 2024 and an open lesson for e-Learning in May 2024 — were being trialled with the support from five schools. Our gratitude is extended to the following five schools for their support and contributions to the LH activities.

In 2024/25, schools will be offered more opportunities to share best practices, exchange ideas, and get feedback, thereby cultivating collaboration to enhance teaching quality and support teachers' professional development.

**Winnie Cheung and Brenda Choy,
Curriculum Development Officers
NET Section**

Sharing Schools

Literacy Development

- **Alliance Primary School (Whampoa)**
  MARCH **14**
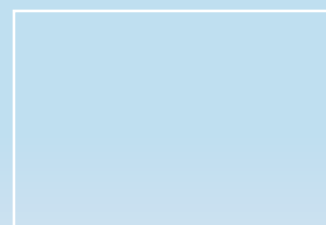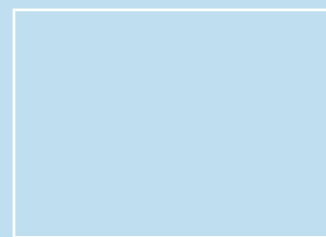
- **Pat Heung Central Primary School**
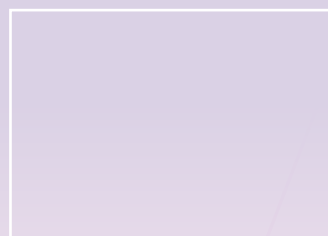
- **Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School**

e-Learning

- **Tsz Wan Shan Catholic Primary School**
  MAY **20**

- **Precious Blood Primary School (Happy Valley)**
  MAY **23**

Incorporating Learning Through Play (LtP) in Space Town

Alliance Primary School (Whampoa)

The 'Learning Through Play' project is designed to complement the Space Town Literacy Programme Unit 14 — 'The Pirate, the Parrot, and Fun at the Bun Festival'. The key objective is to incorporate play-based learning activities to engage students and foster their literacy development in a fun and interactive way. The project features four stations: Small World Play, Atelier, Book Nook, and the Writing Table.

The key benefit of this project is to allow students to learn through the power of play. By making the content engaging and fun, it enhances their motivation and enjoyment of the literacy activities.

Furthermore, the project provides a valuable platform for formative assessment, as teachers can observe and document the students' learning progress through their play-based interactions and written work.

Parents also greatly appreciate receiving the assessment portfolios, as it gives them a comprehensive understanding of their child's development and learning journey within the unit.

**Abuzar Abbasi, Advisory Teacher**
NET Section
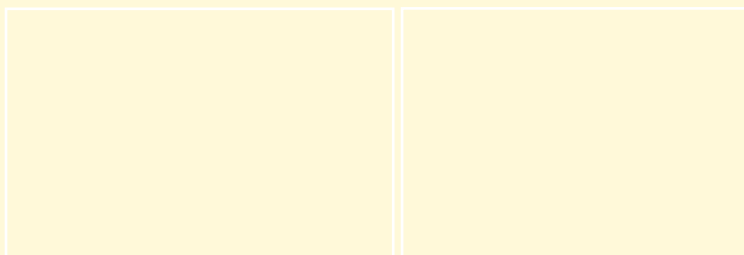
Inquiry through KWHLQA in DTS

Pat Heung Central Primary School

One of the sections of the LH event highlighted the experience of integrating an inquiry-based approach within a DTS unit of work. Pat Heung Central Primary School's presentation showcased the remarkable success of adopting the 5Es framework — Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. This pedagogical strategy proved highly effective in cultivating students' critical thinking skills. Teachers reported that the inquiry-based approach, which had students use a KWHLQA chart to organise their thinking (of What they **K**now, What they **W**ant to know, **H**ow they will find out, What they **L**earned, What **Q**uestions they still have, and What **A**ctions they will take), fostered deeper learning and richer collaboration among students.

Empowering teachers to direct their own investigations has transformed their students' learning experiences, making it both productive and invigorating. Emulating this effective practice to elevate students' learning experiences would be a worthwhile endeavour for other schools to undertake.

Ritika Sethi, Advisory Teacher
NET Section
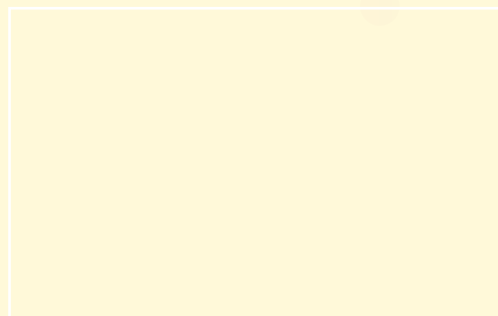
Pathways to Literacy Enrichment through Collaboration, Communication, Exploration and Reflection in Keys2

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School

At Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, we believe the school's success stems from the collective efforts, expertise, and dedication of our teaching team. Our vision is to create a supportive, creative English learning environment where students become independent, lifelong learners. Our teachers regularly co-plan differentiated, inclusive curricula. We involve our principal and advisory teacher to develop robust programmes. Using phonics and comprehension strategies, students are assessed and grouped for guided reading. Our Keys2 programme enables collaborative, communicative learning. English is used school-wide, including in assemblies. Reading across the Curriculum Week links English with other subjects and values. Collaboration and communication are the lifeblood of our team, fostered through co-planning, brainstorming, and open feedback channels.

Charul Maheshwari, NET and
Susan Bowden, Advisory Teacher
NET Section
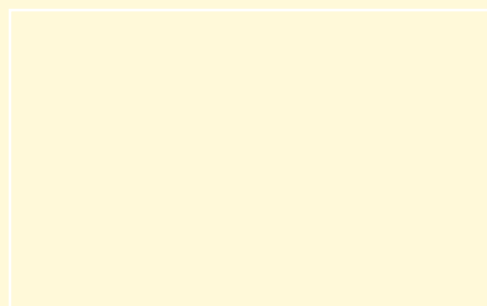
🔴 *Open lesson*

Precious Blood Primary School (Happy Valley) and Tsz Wan Shan Catholic Primary School opened their classrooms to fellow educators. This initiative allowed teachers to observe effective teaching practices in real-time.

Engage and Excel: Enhancing Pre-exam Revision with a Real-time Interactive Platform

The event provided teachers with the opportunity to observe students using the Nearpod platform in a live lesson. The demonstration highlighted Nearpod's features and the integration of other learning apps to enhance student engagement. Nearpod was used to serve as a cohesive, controlled e-learning environment where external app functions could be effectively utilised. This was the first of the two e-Learning Cluster Meetings this year and I found both to be incredibly useful in promoting collaborative learning among teachers, sharing ideas and drawing inspiration for further enhancement of teaching practices.

Andrew Chard, NET
Tsz Wan Shan Catholic Primary School

Enhancing Primary EFL Education through Virtual (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

Precious Blood Primary School

At Precious Blood Primary School, educators witnessed first hand how AR and VR can transform learning. These technologies provided immersive, interactive experiences that captivated students and facilitated deeper engagement with the English language. The demonstrations highlighted AR's and VR's potential to make abstract concepts tangible and stimulate curiosity.

Teachers were encouraged to reflect on their methodologies, which is crucial for professional growth. This reflection allows educators to assess their approaches, identify areas for improvement, and integrate new strategies. The exchange of ideas and feedback within the CoP fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

Principal's Reflection

"We believe that all students explore and learn at their own pace and it is our goal to make the learning process challenging, stimulating and vibrant for them. The use of AR and VR in our English Language classroom provides an experience just like that!

Our NET and Local English Teachers are aware of students' interests and plan accordingly. Observing students at play, identifying their emerging interests and providing opportunities for them to explore those further involve introducing resources and learning experiences that stretch their current abilities further.

We are pleased to see that the integration of AR and VR into our English Language curriculum has helped us instil a passion for learning in students, discover the joys and wonders of play and develop inquisitive minds."

Cheng Sin Nung, Principal
Precious Blood Primary School (Happy Valley)

Teacher's Reflection

"The AR/VR session was a nice opportunity to demonstrate how technology can significantly boost student motivation and engagement in the classroom. Observing students' active participation with simple immersive tools underscored the transformative potential of integrating relatively low-level and easily accessible VR technology into our teaching practices. The Learning Hub session not only provided a practical example of how VR can enhance language learning, but it was also a good opportunity for us all to learn new ideas and approaches from each other, given the open and collegiate atmosphere."

Matthew Hogg, NET
Precious Blood Primary School (Happy Valley)

Inspire Innovate Impact

"These meetings are great to know what other schools are doing. We need more opportunities for schools to learn about other schools' practices.

"I enjoyed the group sharing.

"It was a very well-coordinated session. Thank you, to the EDB NET Section staff and staff of Precious Blood Primary School.

"A positive environment created today, more of a similar nature would be beneficial.

"Would like to see more sharing from other schools on how they incorporate e-learning tools in their regular GE lessons.

"It was great — really well attended with a group of keen and enthusiastic teachers.

"It was good to talk to other teachers. I would be interested to join more sharing sessions.

In this day and age, not many students venture out to see the world for themselves, leading to a lack of learning experiences which can hinder their thinking. It is no wonder, therefore, that students are clueless when asked to think of relevant ideas for their writing tasks. With the so many educational tools nowadays, teachers at our school had an epiphany: so why not bring the world to them, to let them experience it?

In the 2023/24 school year, our school, Lok Sin Tong Leung Kau Kui College, collaborated with the NET Section of the Education Bureau under the "Seed" Project 'Thinking Routines for Writing: Optimising the Writing Experience Within and Beyond the English Language Classroom'. We hoped to enrich students' life experience while cultivating their higher-order thinking. To do this, we incorporated the technology of VR Cave and Thinking Routines into one of our units on 'Volunteering Experiences'.

Different angles and perspectives can be adjusted by using a remote control, which allows the class to focus on a point of interest for further analysis.

Sub-divided flats in Hong Kong tend to have religious altars. A student commented that "people who live in these poor situations need to hold onto some kind of hope to continue surviving."

Students can still work on their while-viewing tasks when simultaneously being immersed in the virtual space. Teachers can still manage the flow of the VR Cave lesson seamlessly.

The VR Cave is a virtual reality space which has projection screens all around to create an immersive virtual environment. In one of the lessons, our students were immersed in 360° videos. With a first-person perspective, they 'visited and explored inside' Hong Kong's coffin homes and sub-divided flats, as if they were the volunteers themselves. In the virtual space, by 'walking through' the narrow corridors and tiny sleeping 'boxes' of these coffin homes and sub-divided flats, our students witnessed how minuscule, deficient and hopeless the residents' living conditions are. By using the Thinking Routine 'See, Think, Me, We', students were guided to describe what they saw, express what they thought as well as connect the topic with themselves and the community at large.

3D art representation of the coffin homes and sub-divided flats recreated by students

By emulating an 'authentic' learning space via the VR Cave and invoking thoughtful discussions via Thinking Routines, we were able to bring the world to our students and provide them with 'firsthand' experience to build upon. These showed the growth from timid and clueless to engaged, curious and active students. From that, we can proudly say that these 'seeds' have started to sprout beautifully. Someday, with the experiences that our students have gained, we are sure that they will flower and spread their pollen to inspire more good changes in the society.

Mr Jaison Fung (top) and Ms Luana Hasell (officer from the NET Section) challenged students' standpoints by using Thinking Routines.

*A mini student art exhibition entitled 'Living? In Hong Kong'*

At the end, using another Thinking Routine 'I used to think... Now I think...', students compared their initial and final impressions of living in Hong Kong. Some of them commented that "they knew that living in Hong Kong isn't easy, but they hadn't known how truly grim the reality is for some of its citizens." In their writing task (a speech about a volunteering experience), a student wondered: "how can someone stand living in these conditions?" while another student expressed that "as a member of the community, we can play an important role by volunteering and helping those in need." As we see here, not only have our students gained knowledge and experience, but more importantly, they have fostered sympathy towards the people in need.

Students giving a speech about their 'volunteering experience' at the coffin homes and sub-divided flats

Jaison Fung Chee Hin, English Language Teacher
Lok Sin Tong Leung Kau Kui College

Using Pop Culture to Foster Other Learning Experiences:
# Collaboration through Cooking
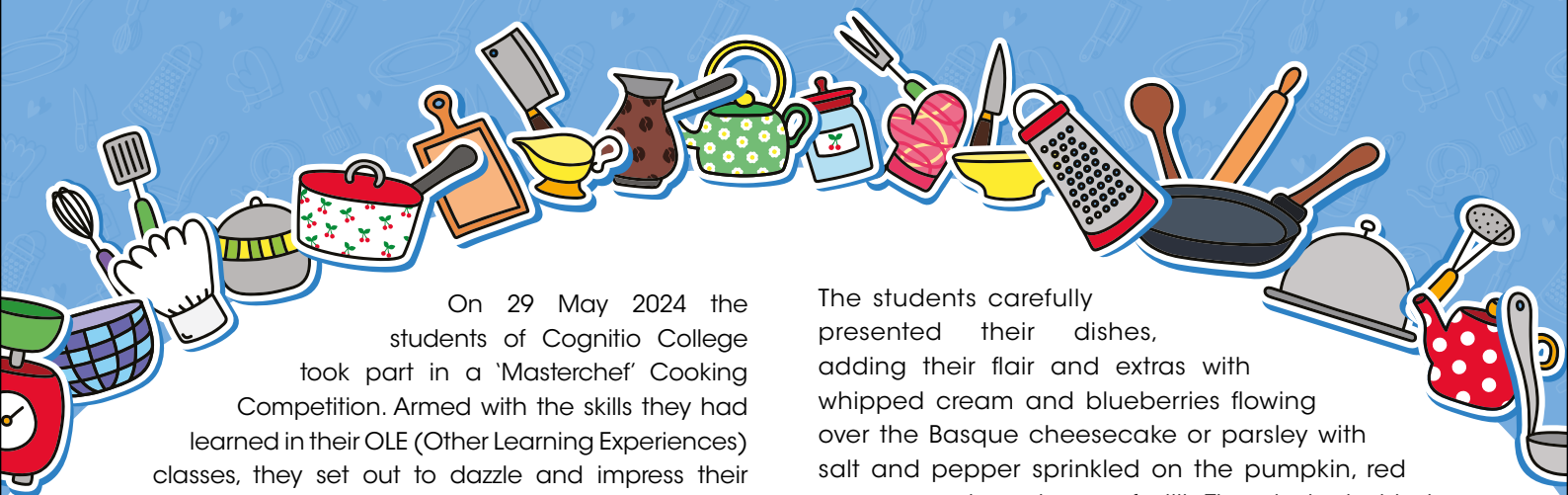
On 29 May 2024 the students of Cognitio College took part in a 'Masterchef' Cooking Competition. Armed with the skills they had learned in their OLE (Other Learning Experiences) classes, they set out to dazzle and impress their judges. In attendance of this extravaganza, we were lucky enough to secure Ms Luana Hasell from the NET Section, our lovely Vice Principal, Ms Alice Wong, our Drama teacher, Ms Yolanda So, and of course our distinguished Principal, Mr Tam.

The students carefully presented their dishes, adding their flair and extras with whipped cream and blueberries flowing over the Basque cheesecake or parsley with salt and pepper sprinkled on the pumpkin, red pepper, and mushroom fusilli. The students tried to make their dishes look restaurant quality. They carefully presented their dishes to the judges telling them what they named their dishes and how they prepared them. Sometimes with a bit too much information, with one judge commenting that, "I wish they'd skipped the part about how much sugar they used," as she chuckled.

The judges made their way around the kitchen asking students what they were making, what their ingredients were and what their next steps were going to be, even offering advice on how to improve on their skills. One judge even commented on how the "students had trialled different methods to come up with the best result" when the team was making their pancakes. The students were so excited and there was a buzz in the air as the hour-long preparation time came to a close.

All in all, everyone really enjoyed their time in the 'Masterchef' kitchen. Judges' comments included "this was soooooooooo good! Loved everything about this" and "complex flavour and sophisticated" as well as "looks stunning and fresh out of a shop!" This will definitely be a competition that we will do again and hopefully it will become a cherished mainstay in our OLE classes.

Laena Kostianos, NET
Cognitio College (Kowloon)
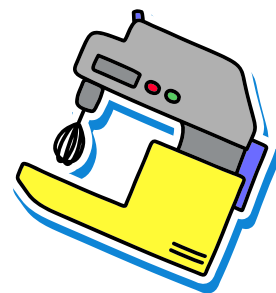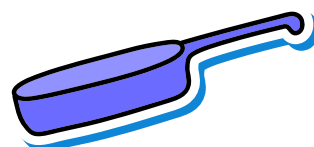
Students participated in the 'Masterchef' Cooking Competition demonstrated a high level of cooking skill and more importantly, used English as a means of authentic communication. **Here are their reflections:**

I learnt new words about cooking and developed good habits in the kitchen.

– Yip Wai Yin, 4A

I was really excited about the competition. I enjoyed talking to the judges when we were cooking and the vibe was really good. Also when we were cooking we were really in the situation of competition so I felt nervous. I loved the process of putting my food together.

– Ng Cheuk Kei, 4B

I really enjoyed the 'Masterchef' Cooking Competition because it was fun. We did it ourselves and we won!

– Chan Kwun Kwok, 4C

Visiting Cognitio College (Kowloon) and judging the the 'Masterchef' with other judges was really enjoyable. It was, in fact, even more fun for the judges than the students, as we were able to sample some of the amazing dishes prepared for us. It was clear that they were all budding gourmets and knew their way around the kitchen. Everyone diced, chopped, steamed and cooked with precision. Like every good cook, they also knew that the kitchen and their workspace needed to be spick and span when they had finished. The beef pie was mouthwatering with just the right amount of flavouring. This was followed by a delicious mushroom and pumpkin pasta dish. By this stage the judges were feeling comfortably full but who could say no to dessert. We were treated to chocolate and banana pancakes and a slice of Basque cheesecake. Both of these offered just the right amount of sweetness and became more delicious with every bite. Everyone was a winner. The thing that impressed me the most was the attention to detail and the excellent teamwork and bonding shown by every group. I am counting down the days until the next 'Masterchef' Cooking Competition.

– Luana Hasell, Regional NET Coordinator

PUBLIC SPEAKING - BUILDING SKILLS AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

Public speaking is a fundamental life skill and an integral part of any educational curriculum. Every individual will need to speak in front of a large audience at least once in their lifetime. Building strong connections and partnerships with primary schools is also an area that receives a lot of attention, not only to make the transition from P6 to S1 more seamless, but to engage the wider community and showcase a secondary school's curriculum programme.

Raimondi College organised a public speaking competition between Raimondi College and Raimondi College Primary Section as a suitable way to encourage public speaking, while at the same time providing transition opportunities for P6 and S1-2 students to learn from each other.

The Raimondi Inaugural Joint Schools Public Speaking Competition aimed to promote the development of public speaking and communication skills among students. It provided a unique platform for Raimondi students to challenge themselves, inspire their peers, and serve as role models for effective communication. The competition was also the launch pad for a new mentorship programme, where seasoned orators, overseen by the NET, worked closely with younger students to refine their speaking abilities and build new skills.

The competition showcased the students' creativity, confidence, and engagement. Mr Hugh Beames from the NET Section was invited as a special guest judge, providing students with the opportunity to learn from a seasoned professional. His insightful feedback and constructive criticism throughout the event undoubtedly left a lasting impact on the participants, inspiring them to further refine their public speaking skills. The competition was met with considerable enthusiasm and segues perfectly into the oncoming NET Section Time to Talk Public Speaking Competition.

The 14 participants captivated the audience with their well-rehearsed and researched speeches, each presenting a unique perspective on one aspect of modern society. The judges focused on three main categories - creativity, confidence, and engagement - in awarding the prizes. The English Society also awarded a Popular Vote Prize for the most popular speech.

To support the competition, Mr Beames gave feedback on the three focus areas for participants, namely creativity, confidence and engagement, advice suitable for speakers of any level.

The three focus areas include:

Creativity

- Use storytelling. People love stories, so incorporate at least one. Share personal experiences or use anecdotes, to ensure your speech is relatable and engaging.

- Use creative language. Instead of employing boring and clichéd phrases, experiment with descriptive language, such as metaphor, similes, and repetition to paint a picture in your audience's mind.

- Involve the audience. Engage your audience by asking them rhetorical questions, encouraging them to 'mentally' participate. This will make your speech more interactive and keep your audience attentive.

- Be passionate. Show your enthusiasm and love for your topic. Make your speech compelling and inspire your audience to listen carefully.

- Use effective body language. Your body language can also add to the creativity of your speech. Utilise hand gestures, facial expressions, and movement to emphasise key points and keep your audience engaged.

Engagement

- Use a 'hook' to grab the audience's attention at the beginning. Then keep up the momentum, using a steady flow to maintain interest.

- Use a list in your speech, for instance … 'let me give you three reasons – reason 1, reason 2, reason 3.'

- Stand closer to the audience. Take charge! Don't be frightened of your listeners.

- Engage humour or emotions, to encourage the audience to respond to and engage with the content.

- Use a visual aid or prop to make the presentation stand out from the crowd. Create a memorable moment, eg, party poppers, singing a song, reading from a newspaper or wearing a special hat.

- Finish your speech with a flourish. Make a memorable statement at the end or conclude with a strong 'call to action'. Avoid generic, boring endings, such as, 'thank you for listening', or 'this is the end of our presentation'. Generic endings only waste the final chance to impress.

Confidence

- Practise, practise, practise! Know your topic well, before presentation day. Never read from sheets of paper. The most important thing is to 'be yourself' and let your personality shine through. Ensure you are comfortable in delivery, to make your words more authentic.

- If using visual supports, such as a PowerPoint presentation, don't refer to them too often – try to maintain eye contact with your audience at all times.

- Modulate your voice and speak expressively. Don't bore your audience.

- Use good volume and a strong commanding voice, especially if you are wearing a mask. Project your voice to the back of the room.

- Use palm cards as a useful back-up, especially if you are nervous.

The Joint Schools Public Speaking Competition was a momentous inaugural event that celebrated the power of effective communication. The success of the competition not only strengthened the ties between the two schools, but also provided a valuable platform for P6 to showcase their talents, setting the stage for future endeavours in public speaking.

Andrew Varsalona – Blatti, NET
Raimondi College

Hugh Beames, Advisory Teacher
NET Section

A Fantastic Theatrical Journey from 'Story' to 'Stage' with Puppetry

The Story to Stage Puppetry Competition for Primary Schools, organised by the NET Section since the 2014/15 school year, has become an invaluable platform for students to explore the exciting journey from devising a story to their final performance on stage through the art of puppetry. This competition recognises the immense pedagogical value of puppetry in enhancing English language learning and fostering creativity.

Puppetry is a versatile tool that greatly enhances English learning in the primary school classroom. The tangible, imaginative nature of puppetry sparks students' enthusiasm and confidence by making language learning less abstract. The process of developing scripts, designing puppets and props, and performing puppet shows encourages students to utilise essential skills such as creativity and communication. Additionally, the collaborative nature of preparing a puppet show fosters important social skills like teamwork and problem-solving, which complement students' overall language development.

The competition has grown tremendously over the years, expanding from a pilot scheme with 17 participating schools in its inaugural year to 124 schools and 139 entries in the 2023/24 school year. To accommodate the increasing number of participants, the adjudication team has also expanded, allowing for more comprehensive assessments and valuable feedback for the entries.

In the early years, schools were selected by lottery to participate. In the 2019/20 school year, the competition was temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the 2020/21 school year, the competition has transitioned to video submissions, which has enabled more schools to get involved. In the 2023/24 school year, we took a further step to combine video submissions and live performances, culminating in the inaugural Story to Stage Championship of Hong Kong held on 27 June 2024. The winning teams from each video submission session came together to deliver captivating on-stage performances, creating a truly memorable and enriching experience for all involved.

Through the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition for Primary Schools, students embark on an enchanting theatrical journey that nurtures their creativity, language skills, and confidence. As the competition continues to grow, it serves as a testament to the transformative power of puppetry as a unique and engaging pedagogical approach to English language learning.

Puppetry Team
NET Section

*Scan the QR Code for
more details about the competition.*
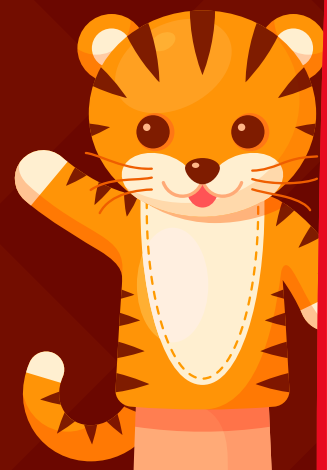
Let's explore the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition for Primary Schools from different perspectives:

It was an honour and great pleasure to adjudicate the Story to Stage Championship of Hong Kong. The nine performances showcased students' puppeteering artistry, excellent teamwork, and outstanding English language skills, including creative dialogue, narration, song, rhythm and rhyme, and verbal word play. The joy with which each team performed was evident in students' expressive and lively voices, and the whole atmosphere was one of inclusion and celebration. Each puppet show conveyed the theme of love in meaningful and often poignant ways. Critically exploring what shapes one's identity and the importance of loving ourselves was a key message in several of the shows. Other performances examined our connection to family and community, past and present, and the necessity of attending to the health of our planet and the well-being of animals. This event highlights the affordances of puppetry as a rich and holistic educational task. Many congratulations to all the school teams and teachers!

Dr Margaret M. Lo, Former Assistant Professor, Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership, Faculty of Education, The Univesity of Hong Kong

The Story to Stage Championship of Hong Kong was an impressive showcase of the linguistic, artistic, and theatrical talents of students from across Hong Kong schools. As a judge for this year's championship, I was really impressed by the variety of the stories developed, the creative use of language, and the artistic ingenuity displayed. Focusing on the theme of Love, I was particularly impressed by the interdisciplinary connections made through the stories, the messages intended for the audience, and the use of other artistic techniques to support this. Importantly, each performance demonstrated exceptional teamwork and collaboration, with students skillfully employing a range of puppetry techniques matched by well-designed puppets, backdrops, props, and transitions. This competition truly exemplifies the innovative spirit and collaborative efforts of Hong Kong's teachers and their students. I'm already looking forward to what 2024/25 has in store! Congratulations and well done to all.

Dr Margaret Lo (left) and Dr Paul Campbell adjudicating the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition

Dr Paul Campbell, Research Assistant Professor,
Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Education University of Hong Kong

It was a sheer delight adjudicating for the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition. Its design has created ample room for teachers to work with students to nurture their creativity, develop their artistic potential, and sharpen their communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills, among its many other benefits. The fact that the video submitted needs to be non-edited also emphasises the naturalness of interactions and spontaneity in speech. Watching each performance, I'm amazed by the uniqueness of each team's approach. Still vivid in my memory are the making of the context-appropriate puppets and their costumes, the interesting props and the beautiful illustrations in the backdrops, the puppets' attempt to connect themselves with the audience, the teamwork of each member involved, and the warmth in each 'family' production. It is truly an honour to have been invited to be an adjudicator of this event. I'm already looking forward to the next one.

Nicole J. Tavares, MA(TESOL) Programme Director and Senior Lecturer, Academic Unit of Language and Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

Hello, it was my first time participating in the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition as a teacher coordinator, and overall it was a terrific learning experience. I believe this competition is a great way to enhance students' confidence and improve their creativity skills. Throughout the learning and filming period, the students were really participative and excited. Moreover, teachers can encourage the soft-spoken students to participate in this competition, as it doesn't require them to face a large audience. For example, a student from our group is quite reserved and tends to speak softly in general. However, in our act his performance was just commendable. I definitely recommend all of the schools to participate in this competition and to encourage students with different abilities to take part in it.

Areej Kianat, NET, Ma On Shan Ling Liang Primary School

The five amazing students from Canossa Primary school (San Po Kong) have experienced a remarkable transformation through their involvement in the art of puppetry. As they honed their puppetry skills acquired from the past year, they found themselves gaining confidence in expressing emotions through their speech and movements. This newfound confidence extended beyond their performances, positively impacting their interactions with their peers. They discovered that personal development can be an enjoyable and fulfilling journey, as they embraced the challenge of conveying complex emotions through their puppets. Through this process, they not only learned the art of puppetry but also developed crucial life skills, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-assuredness that will undoubtedly benefit them in their future education.

Alex Buckley, NET, Canossa Primary School (San Po Kong)

The Story to Stage Puppetry Competition provides students with valuable opportunities for creative expression and skill development. Students enhance their problem-solving, fine motor, and artistic abilities by designing, constructing, and manipulating puppets. The performance aspect of the competition also boosts students' public speaking skills, showmanship, and confidence. Students learn to collaborate, communicate, and divide responsibilities effectively in teams. The competition exposes students to diverse puppetry styles and techniques, broadening their artistic horizons. The thrill of the competition motivates students to push their limits and take pride in their achievements. The puppetry competition offers a fun and enriching way for students to explore their creativity and teamwork, build puppetry skills, and develop important personal qualities.

Mary Ligo, NET, Shak Chung Shan Memorial Catholic Primary School

Puppetry has been a cherished part of our school's extra-curricular activities for many years. We are fortunate to have all the necessary materials to create puppets and backdrops, along with a school-owned tent that allows our puppeteers to practise and perform throughout the year. Additionally, we have two special teams, each consisting of five students, who don't compete but delight audiences at school events and local kindergartens. Our puppetry team was thrilled to perform live at this year's Story to Stage Puppetry Competition. They marvelled at the positive-themed stories presented in imaginative ways and styles. The best part, according to the team, was working together, and they eagerly anticipate sharing a new story with a different theme next year.

Veronica Naw-Sar-Htoo-Waa, NET, S.K.H. Wing Chun Primary School

Creating a convivial atmosphere in which students feel comfortable and free to generate and expand upon ideas are of paramount importance to producing an intriguing, humourous and highly relatable script. Making constant references in future gatherings to students' own ideas and anecdotes not only inculcates them to attend these gatherings with freedom and enthusiasm, but also gives them a sense of pride in their work and boosts their confidence in using English. All their ideas are written down, spread out and added to during every puppetry gathering, creating a vast mural of their work. The benefits are mindblowing! The teacher's role is merely as a conductor - albeit a highly skilled, extremely proficient and passionate one! Happy brainstorming!

*Justin Sellers, NET, Po Leung Kuk Chan Yat Primary School*

For The Salvation Army Tin Ka Ping's Puppetry Team, taking part in this year's Story to Stage Puppetry Competition was challenging yet hugely rewarding. At the very least, simply finding time to rehearse when each of our schedules aligned was a task!

Yet, this came to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the process; collaborating with students we hadn't known previously was a refreshing opportunity to meet new schoolmates and gain new perspectives.

Working with five students from different classes allowed us to strengthen our weaknesses. Where one of us lacked confidence in voice projection, another had brilliant volume control. Where one of us needed to refine the entrances and exits of the puppets, another manoeuvred their puppet expertly.

Learning from each other and working as a team enabled us to grow together and make the most of the valuable experience provided by the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition.

Rebecca Hayward, NET, Salvation Army Tin Ka Ping School
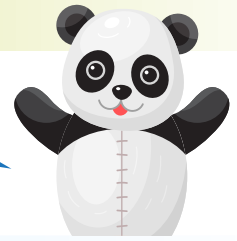
Po Yan Oblate Primary School

"I was able to learn so much on the theme of love. I learned the importance of having our friends and our loved ones by our sides!"

– Nelson Mak , 4A

"I found it very challenging at the beginning, as I had many lines to memorise, but with practice, I was able to finally memorise them all. I am going to miss my group!"

– Kayley Chan, 4B

"I did not expect the whole process to be so difficult. There were so many rules to follow and it was very tiring to keep my arm up for so long. However, it was all worth it in the end because we had a lot of fun and laughter. I would 100% do it again next year if I had the opportunity!"

– Angell Li , 4B

"I want to say a huge thank you to Mr William and Miss Lau for taking the time to help us once a week for many months after school. I learned so much from both of them and learned a lot more English words and phrases as well. Friendship, forgiveness, and love unite!"

– Cayden Chan, 4B

The Endeavourers Leung Lee Sau Yu Memorial Primary School

"Being part of the Story to Stage Competition was an amazing experience! Regular practice sessions helped us improve our speaking skills, and it was so much fun!"

– Kiki Cao, 6E

"Puppetry opened up a whole new world for me. I used to be shy when speaking English, but now I feel confident thanks to our puppet performances."

– Coco Song, 5C

The Salvation Army Ting Ka Ping Primary School

"I gained so much confidence in projecting my voice by working with the puppets and my puppetry teammates!"

– Zoran Cheng, 6G

"Getting into the mindset of my puppet helped me to imagine and perfect its natural movements. This was great advice from my teammate, Amie!"

– Colby Ng, 6D

"The competition gave me a really interesting insight into all of the important aspects of telling a good story. Storytelling is about more than a well written script!"

– Adrian Lam, 6F

Sham Shui Po Government Primary School

Joining the Story to Stage Puppetry Competition brought so much fun and joy to our school life. We built solid friendships, learnt how to work and cooperate as a team, care for each other and how to appreciate and value ourselves. This journey gave us so many unforgettable memories, and winning the championship was euphoric. We had many ups and downs during our rehearsals, but it was all worth the experience and we are proud of what we've achieved. It's a precious gift that we're going to bring along with us as we go. Thank you so much for providing us with such a wonderful opportunity that allowed us to grow and flourish with diligence and celebrate our success.

– Puppetry Team
(Bibi Mahnoor, Colin Lee, Angel Yeung, Humayun Salwah Bibi, Charmaine Sin)

Speak Up – Act Out is Back on Stage

The Speak Up – Act Out Drama Competition organised by the Regional NET Coordinating Team (RNCT) of the NET Section has been through a number of manifestations over the years since it was first launched in the 2008/09 school year as the 'Speak Out – Act Up!' Improvised Drama Competition. In the 2019/20 school year, the competition was rebranded with more fitting phrasal verbs – Speak Up (not Out) – Act Out (not Up)! – and the inverted commas were dropped. The competition then survived the pandemic years by morphing into the Speak Up – Act Out! On Air! Improvised Drama Competition, a live radio drama competition conducted in real time via *Zoom*.

This school year, for the first time since the pandemic, Speak Up – Act Out has returned to the stage (minus the exclamation mark) with two categories for schools to choose from: Improvised Drama (formerly known as the 1-day Improv category) or Devised Drama (formerly known as the 2-week Improv category). The stimulus for the Improvised Drama category this year was a line of dialogue, given to teams on the day, only a few hours before they performed; the stimulus for the Devised Drama category was an image, emailed to teams approximately ten school days before each session.

To support teachers with training students in improvised drama techniques, the Speak Up – Act Out Improvised Drama Workshop was also brought back, but with a new emphasis on teaching students how to devise a story from an image. Teachers new to improvised drama were required to attend the workshop so that they could train their students for the competition. Many of the drama activities featured in the workshop could also be integrated into English lessons to enhance student learning.

What follows are some of the highlights of the Speak Up - Act Out Drama Competition 2023/24, beginning with the two workshops that were held in November 2023; then moving on to the Improvised Drama session that took place on a Saturday in late April 2024; and finally, on to the five sessions of the Devised Drama category, which also took place in late April 2024. For information about the prize-winning teams in each session of the competition, please visit the NET Scheme e-Platform.

Speak Up - Act Out Improvised Drama Workshop

The Speak Up – Act Out Improvised Drama Workshop is a full day workshop (6 hours) on the use of improvised drama techniques. The workshop was offered twice to accommodate as many teachers as possible. The first workshop took place on 8 November 2023 at the NET Section office in Tsuen Wan. The second workshop happened one week later on 16 November 2023 at Stewards Pooi Tun Secondary School.

**Speak Up – Act Out Drama Competition:
Improvised Drama Category**

The Improvised Drama session took place at Pooi Tun Secondary School on Saturday, 20 April 2024. The stimulus for all teams was, "I thought you said there was only one." Teams practised for two hours in the morning and performed in the afternoon after having lunch in the school canteen.

**Speak Up – Act Out Drama Competition:
Devised Drama Category**

There were five sessions in the Devised Drama category, which took place in late April 2024 at various venues around Hong Kong. Hong Kong street artist Rob Sketcherman gave the NET Section permission to use his digital sketches of iconic locations in Hong Kong as stimuli for the different sessions of the competition.

Session 1: Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre, 23 April 2024

Session 2: Ying Wa Girls' School, 24 April 2024

Session 3: Pooi To Middle School, 25 April 2024

Session 4: Tuen Mun Town Hall, 29 April 2024

Session 5: Pooi To Middle School, 30 April 2024

We hope these images inspire you to get your students involved in the Speak Up - Act Out Drama Competition 2024/25!

**Speak Up – Act Out Team
NET Section**

Speaking to Writing: A Journey into Words and Wonder ✏️

The Speaking to Writing "Seed" Project

In the 2022/23 school year, the Speaking to Writing (S2W) "Seed" project was initiated by the NET Section. The project was also supported by a team of experts from the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (Australia) who provided training for teachers in the Talk4Writing approach. This was of particular interest due to the outstanding progress made by English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in UK schools when using oral storytelling to support writing (Renwick, 2010). From our collective learning and collaboration with schools, we adapted the ideas to fit school contexts and develop units of work.

The Importance of Talking and Oral Language in Teaching Writing

For some children, sitting on a mat and reading a book is not enough. The opportunity to interact verbally, visually and joyfully with a memorable, meaningful version of a text is very powerful (Corbett & Strong, 2018). For example, involving children in learning a story orally enables them to internalise a narrative pattern and language features. This internalised language can then act as a launch pad for creativity in writing.

What is Talk for Writing? Pie Corbett explains:

Using oral communication to enhance the instruction of writing and reading is grounded in well-established evidence within the field of educational and developmental psychology. The neural pathways required for biologically primary skills, such as spoken language, have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. In contrast, the ability to use language for reading and writing (biologically secondary skills) is a relatively recent development in human history. Learning a biologically secondary skill is made easier by connecting instructional activities with a biologically primary skill (Geary, 2008).

Learning a Model Text

Units begin with the internalisation of a model text, which is learnt orally and supported by a story map and actions. This text provides targeted examples of the language and 'tools' that will help students improve their writing.

Moving from Speaking into Writing

Discussion is central to grammar and sentence level work, helping to build knowledge of language features and expand vocabulary. Initially, writing takes place in short bursts, before students are encouraged to help create a new 'class' version of the text they are working on.

Creative Ownership

By the end of each unit, children create their own unique version of the text. They are able to incorporate their own ideas, new vocabulary and the targeted language built into the units.

**Roland Smith, Gareth Storey, Advisory Teachers, and Maria Chau, Project Officer
NET Section**

Designing Tailor-made Units

The desire to support our students to express themselves more confidently and communicate their ideas in meaningful contexts led us to join the Speaking to Writing (S2W) "Seed" project. The project aims to enhance students' writing skills through the process of internalising texts and language orally.

We have implemented the project over two years, involving teachers from P4 and P5 year levels. Teachers have received planning and classroom support from the Advisory Teaching Team of the NET Section, along with professional development, advice and feedback on observed lessons from literacy experts and Talk4Writing trainers from DSF Australia. This has had a powerful impact on our theoretical and practical understanding of how writing can be taught.

Boxing up the text

Our initial units focused on the narrative text type. Built into the language of each text was a different focus intended to move students' writing forward. Our first P4 unit, 'Little Charlie', focused on the description of characters. This was followed by 'Little Red Riding Hood', which targeted the rich description of settings. The following year, we added 'The Magic Porridge Pot' to P4 units, where students targeted incorporating elements of suspense into their writing.

Story map for 'The Magic Porridge Pot'

When the students moved into P5, 'The Papaya That Spoke' provided opportunities for developing the use of dialogue in narrative texts.

Here we can see the students practising a new innovated version of the story:

▶ *The Papaya That Spoke — Class Innovation*

Finally, in our most recent unit we tackled a non-fiction text titled 'The Manchester Ridgeback' where students worked on an information text focusing on the use of generalisers.

▶ *Internalising a non-fiction text*

▶ *An example of a student practising a story map at home to share with classmates*

One of my favourite parts of planning and teaching lessons has been our students' reactions to our creative hooks. These moments are designed to engage children playfully from the very start of any unit. These have ranged from an outdoor crime scene discovery to a mysterious dragon's egg delivery!

A mystery package

For both students and teachers, it has been a wonderful journey so far, and we are excited to continue next year.

Lee Gladrey, NET
PLK Tin Ka Ping Millennium Primary School

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The Impact of the S2W "Seed" Project

The ultimate goal of this project was to equip students with independent writing skills and to see our students go beyond the original text's framework. We wanted students to apply what they had learnt in their own writing, independently. The impact was demonstrated by analysing the growth students had made between a pre-unit 'cold task' and post-unit 'hot task'. This independent writing represented the culmination of the students' learning journey. Here, after all the internalisation of language and experimenting with writing styles, students had the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of the writing process.

We were excited to share the evidence of this growth, tracked across units, to a full-house of teachers during our cluster meeting hosted at the NET Section Office in May 2024. Our students are making dramatic progress and there are clear changes in their writing in terms of number of words, ideas, use of key connectives, range of vocabulary and inclusion of literary devices.

For example, last year before S2W was implemented, our students barely organised their writing in paragraphs or structured them with key connectives, but now this is seen in almost every piece of their writing, along with a greater range and complexity of language. In our most recent narrative unit, 'The Papaya That Spoke', the text was designed to develop the use of dialogue through powerful speech verbs and stage directions. Before this unit, "said" was the only speech verb our students could use and 'stage directions' were not found in students' work. Now, our students have not only internalised a variety of speech verbs and 'stage directions', but they can naturally apply these when writing different stories, creating their own unique texts confidently and with creativity.

It is highly encouraging to see that students are able to transfer the writing skills and knowledge they have mastered in different contexts.

The GE writing task showing the transference of skills into new writing tasks — use of dialogue shown in red, key connectives in blue and other literary devices in yellow

Teachers increasingly see many examples of the more sophisticated language from S2W units appearing naturally in GE and assessment tasks. This effect does not only last for a short period of time, but it is continuously happening and accumulating, showing how new language is being added to children's repertoire. Teachers feel energised by this evidence that the approach is really working.

Looking forward, next year we will be expanding the number of units in P4 and P5, and extending the project into P6. Having implemented our first non-fiction text this year, we will continue to develop units using a range of text types. It will be another interesting and exciting planning, learning and teaching journey for both our students and teachers.

Natalie Shin, EPC
PLK Tin Ka Ping Millennium Primary School

The S2W "Seed" project was an interesting process as a teacher, but was a particularly satisfying one thanks to the high level engagement alongside swift development of students' confidence.

Tony Ryan, NET
Christian Pui Yan Primary School

S2W is an approach that is enjoyable for both students and teachers. The growth we observed in students' writing ability exceeded our expectations, and the skills learned through this approach have even been seen to have been independently applied to other areas of their work, such as in their GE lessons.

The experience has left us excited to develop the next S2W unit and see our students' confidence and ability in writing develop even further.

Mitch Robinson, NET, and
Katherine Cheng, EPC
SKH Tsing Yi Chu Yan Primary School