

## **Moving forward with schools**

### **– A Report on the Research and Development Project in Two Primary Schools to Enhance the Learning and Teaching of Reading (TSA)**

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#### **I. Introduction**

This document reports the implementation and findings of the research and development project conducted in two primary schools, PFL Primary School and WD Primary School (both pseudonyms), from October to December 2009. The present project is Phase III of the study entitled "The Study of Using Assessment Data to Enhance Learning and Teaching (English Language Education)". The report will begin with the objectives of the research followed by an overview of the project. It will then detail the collaboration between the teachers and the research team throughout the development process of the teaching-learning-evaluation cycle. The last sections of the report will cover the findings of the project and make recommendations for future projects.

#### **II. Investigators of the project**

The HKU team consisted of Dr Anthony K.K. Tong, the principal investigator of the project, and Ms Doreen Mei Yee Ho, the co-investigator.

#### **III. Objectives**

The objectives of the project were:

- (i) to explore together with the teachers, in the context of teaching and learning in the schools and making use of assessment data (including TSA data), to identify specific learning and teaching needs of their primary six students, particularly the learning effectiveness of the low achievers; and
- (ii) to report and to develop the good practices of the teachers in participating schools; and
- (iii) to identify successful strategies for the considerations of teachers in other schools to adopt or adapt in their own school contexts.

#### IV. Participation

The project was completed in two different primary schools in Hong Kong: PFL Primary School and WD Primary School (both pseudonyms). Table 1 presents an overview of the two different implementations of the project in these two schools:

School	No. of Teacher Participants	No. of P.6 Classes involved in project	Project Period
PFL Primary School	3	2	23 October 2009 – 23 November 2009
WD Primary School	3	3	27 October 2009 – 21 December 2009

Table 1: An overview of the participation in the two schools

#### V. Collaboration with Teachers in the Primary Schools

##### A. PFL Primary School

- A total of four meetings were held between the HKU team and the participating teachers in PFL Primary School. Details of these meetings are given in Table 2 below.

1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting	23 October 2009	3:45 – 5:30pm
2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting	16 November 2009	4:00 – 5:00pm
3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting	19 November 2009	12:00 – 1:00pm
4 <sup>th</sup> Meeting	23 November 2009	3:45 – 4:45pm

Table 2: Dates and time of the meetings with the participating teachers in PFL Primary School.

Details of meeting logs can be found in Appendix 1.

- A total of two lessons taught by the participating teachers in PFL Primary School were observed by the HKU team. Details of these lessons are presented in Table 3.

1 <sup>st</sup> Class Visit (6A)	19 November 2009	9:45 - 10:20
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Visit (6B)	19 December 2009	10:20. – 12:30

Table 3: Dates and time of the lessons observed by the HKU team

Details of class visit logs can be found in Appendix 2.

- Table 4 details the collaboration process between the PFL teachers and the research team in deciding on the learning focuses and in developing the related learning tasks.

<b><i>PFL Teachers' Participation</i></b>	<b><i>HKU Team's participation</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met with HKU team in a pre-lesson meeting and proposed using the reader <i>So You Want To Be On TV?</i> to teach scanning skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed pre-reading activities on tackling difficult words and guided reading activities on comprehending the story flow with a formal (textual) schema.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed a lesson plan, developed a pre-reading prediction activity sheet on people likely to appear in the story and implemented the guided reading activities in two P.6 classes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drafted two guided reading activity sheets as supplementary materials for the lesson. The materials focus on helping students to (i) preview and (ii) become aware of the structure of multiple story structure.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met with HKU team in a post-lesson meeting to discuss the effectiveness of the learning and the lesson plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided feedback on further ideas to exploit the use of the reader, <i>So You Want To Be On TV?</i>, mainly vocabulary activities on (i) jobs and occupation and (ii) the text organization of a presenter's and a performer's dialogue.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared concerns on the difficulty level of the tasks designed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed and provided four tasks related to the two focuses, allowing students to process the selected vocabulary and identify the markers that signal the text organization of a contest.</li> </ul>

Table 4: Description of participation by the HKU team and the PFL school teacher participants

## B. WD Primary School

- A total of seven meetings were conducted in the school for the project. Table 5 below gives the dates and times of these meetings.

1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting	27 October 2009	4:00 – 5:30pm
2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting	11 November 2009	2:00 – 4:00pm
3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting	17 November 2009	3:45 – 5:00pm
4 <sup>th</sup> Meeting	24 November 2009	3:45 – 4:45pm
5 <sup>th</sup> Meeting	1 December 2009	3:45 – 5:30pm
6 <sup>th</sup> Meeting	11 December 2009	3:45 – 5:00pm
7 <sup>th</sup> Meeting	21 December 2009	2:15 - 3:15pm (with students) 3:25 – 5:15pm (with teachers)

Table 5: Dates and time of the meetings with the participating teachers in WD Primary School

Details of meeting logs can be found in Appendix 3.

- A total of 11 lessons were observed by the HKU team in WD Primary School. The time and dates of these lessons are listed in Table 6.

1 <sup>st</sup> Class Visit (6A)	7 December 2009	11:20 – 12:00
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Visit (6B)	7 December 2009	12:00 – 12:40
3 <sup>rd</sup> Class Visit (6C)	8 December 2009	9:50 – 10:30
4 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6B)	8 December 2009	12:00 – 12:40
5 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6B)	9 December 2009	9:50 – 10:30
6 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6A)	10 December 2009	11:40 – 12:10
7 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6A)	10 December 2009	14:00 – 14:30
8 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6C)	10 December 2009	14:00 – 14:30
9 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6B)	11 December 2009	14:20 – 15:00
10 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6C)	11 December 2009	14:20 – 15:00
11 <sup>th</sup> Class Visit (6A, 6B, 6C)	16 December 2009	12:30 – 2:40

Table 6: Dates and time of the lessons observed by the HKU team in WD Primary School.

Details of class visit logs can be found in Appendix 4. Table 7 details the collaboration process between the WD teachers and the research team in deciding on the learning focuses and in developing the related learning tasks.

<b>WD Teachers' Participation</b>	<b>HKU Team's Participation</b>
<b>(Prior to the commencement of this project)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated to the HKU team some normal reading lessons in a Primary 3 class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observed two reading lessons taught by a P3 English teacher live and through video-recording</li> </ul>
<p><b>Needs Analysis Stage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administered a reading strategy survey among all Primary 6 students</li> <li>• Collected and collated the survey results</li> <li>• Interpreted together with the HKU team the survey results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a bilingual questionnaire reading strategy survey (see Appendix 5)</li> <li>• Interpreted together with the school teachers the reading strategy survey results and identified the two reading strategies least adopted by the students: (i) understanding the organization of information in text and (ii) predicting information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Task Development Stage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested the date and period for the tryout of the proposed unit of work</li> <li>• Suggested the topic/theme for the new package</li> <li>• Suggested showing a film that most students liked</li> <li>• Suggested the adoption of a task-based approach and the use of realia (film blurbs) for reading</li> <li>• Suggested the titles of films to be included into the package</li> </ul> <p>Provided feedback to the activities, the tasks, and the texts and materials proposed by the HKU team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested the outline of the unit and the different text types to be included</li> <li>• Based on teachers' suggestions, provided the flow of activities, the learning activities and the instructions for conducting the activities</li> <li>• Collected and collated film blurbs</li> <li>• Edited film blurbs</li> <li>• Designed prediction task sheets for the viewing of the film <i>UP</i></li> <li>• Designed crossword puzzle worksheet to consolidate vocabulary learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Task Implementation Stage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented the activities in all three Primary 6 classes in school</li> <li>• Met with the HKU team regularly to provide feedback and evaluation of students' learning</li> <li>• Met with the HKU team in a post-teaching meeting and proposed possible future collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observed the lessons in which the activities of the package were conducted</li> <li>• Met with the teachers for feedback and comments on the materials and the unit design</li> <li>• Interviewed a sample of students to assess learning effectiveness and identify areas for improvements</li> </ul>

Table 7: Description of participation by the HKU team and the WD Primary School participants

## VI. The Learning Tasks

### A. Pedagogical considerations for the learning tasks at PFL Primary School

Table 8(a) displays the overview of the learning tasks developed with PFL Primary School.

<b>Package School</b>	<b>Topic/Theme</b>	<b>Language points</b>	<b>Skills developed</b>
PFL Primary School	Reader <i>So You Want to be on TV?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guessing/recognising word meaning and word type based on morphological structure of a word.</li> <li>• Relying on the structure of narrative to predict content development</li> <li>• Retrieving specific information from text based on typical text structure of the exchange between a presenter's and performers' language in a TV contest</li> <li>• Revising words of occupations</li> </ul>	<p>(i) Predicting contents based on picture and lexical items;</p> <p>(ii) Raise awareness of text structure and information in text: the (rhetorical) moves of the spoken exchanges between a TV presenter and a performer;</p> <p>(iii) Recognizing occupation words based on word parts (e.g. “-er”; “-ant”; “-ist”)</p> <p>(iv) Working with the target words through some matching and sorting tasks to enhance the acquisition of these words.</p>

Table 8 (a): Overview of the learning package at PFL Primary School

During the collaboration, the teachers and the HKU team exchanged frankly views on the design of the tasks and materials. The following points represented some of the key considerations in the process:

1. An examination of the target text “So you want to be on TV?” (hereafter referred to as the Reader) shows that the Reader has a “very mixed text type”; it contains several, different text types: narrative, conversation and rhymes. The main thrust of the text, including some dialogues in the direct speech, narrates what actually happens during a talent show in which four performances were all presented by four contestants. In addition, the Reader also includes four different interviews of four types of occupations in a TV studio: the make-up artist, the cameraman, the TV presenter, and the set designer. These interviews were written as dialogues separated from the narration. Finally, the songs or rhymes performed by the four contestants were also given as separate texts.
2. In light of the complex textual structure of this Reader, and given that the teacher opined that the students of school were not particularly strong, the HKU team suggested that the different text types in the Reader should be dealt with separately and differently in the lessons. In other words, the teachers were advised against covering the Reader page by page in a sequential manner over the lessons. Rather, each of the text types should be tackled on its own. The teachers took up this suggestion and, for this project, focused first on the narrative and the structure of the spoken exchanges between a TV presenter and a performer.
3. Once the four dialogues between the TP presenter and a performer were fixed as a learning objective, scaffolding was considered important to support learners when asked to process these text segments. The strategy of Reader Theatre was adopted (Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1998) and as the provision of a formal schema to process a specific text type was considered useful to the learner (Hudson, 2007). Consequently, a table listing (rhetorical moves such as “opening up the contest”, “introducing the contestant”, “Short exchanges with the contestant”, “performance and audience reaction”, “closing”) was incorporated into the worksheet (Appendix 6(c)) to assist students to retrieve the relevant bit of information from the text.
4. The HKU team also proposed that the present Reader may not be the most suitable text-type for the practice of scanning. The HKU team was of the opinion that matching the practice of a reading skill with a suitable text

type is important, and scanning would be best used, for example, with an Information Text, rather than this particular Reader. In real life, a reader would often scan through an Information text (such as a list of names in a phone book of a mobile, or a series of film ads for locating the suitable cinema and the show time).

5. On the other hand, both the teachers and the HKU team were in agreement that prediction and occupation words could be suitable learning focuses. For prediction, video-clips of a talent show, the cover of the book and the pictures inside could be exploited. For occupation words, activities could be designed to teach the recognition of words through suffixes such as “-er” as in “teacher” and “rapper”; “-ist” as in “dentist” or “scientist”; or “-ant” as in “shop assistant” or “accountant”. (These were all occupation words students had learned in a previous unit in their coursebook.) It was also noted that these suffixes are relevant to some of new words in the Reader, such as “contestant”, “presenter”, “rapper”, “announcer”, “artist” although these were not necessarily occupation words.
6. The teachers took the initiative to search through YouTube and retrieved a video clip of a talent contest similar to the one in the Reader. The teachers also put forward the welcome suggestion that students be allowed, after having listened to the four performances (through the CD-ROM), to vote the best performer of all four, as audience of the talent show. This obviously had helped to enhance students’ involvement and motivation.
7. Since “learners need to be actively involved in the learning of words” (Thornbury 2002, p. 30) and the success of acquisition is somehow linked to the depth of learners’ involvement (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001), the HKU team also proposed the inclusion of some sorting and matching activities and crossword puzzle (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 108). These activities are regarded by researchers as more effective than most blank-filling exercises for the retention of newly learnt vocabulary items (Appendix 6(b)). They often require learners to engage in processing the target words in greater depth than do those many other vocabulary exercises such as blank-filled sentences. .



## B. Pedagogical considerations for the learning tasks at WD Primary School

Table 8(b) displays the overview of the learning tasks developed for WD Primary School.

Package School	Topic/Theme	Language focuses	Skills developed with specific reference to reading skills covered in TSA
WD Primary School	Films and Film Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using <i>the present perfect, the simple past, and modal verb “would”</i> in context to elicit information and preference in a simple survey</li> <li>• Completing a simple survey form</li> <li>• Reporting survey results in a tally table format</li> <li>• Describing survey results in written form</li> <li>• Identifying film types, key characters in the film and key information e.g. the setting and the plot in a film blurb</li> <li>• Using <i>simple present</i> in the summary of the plot and using <i>simple past</i> to tell one's opinion about a film in a film review</li> <li>• Using <i>-ed</i> and <i>-ing</i> adjectives to describe people's feelings and films</li> <li>• the structure of a film review</li> </ul>	<p>The ability to</p> <p>(i) elicit and respond to simple questions asked in a survey</p> <p>(ii) transfer information from a tally form to a survey report and vice versa.</p> <p>(iii) recognise the text structure of a survey form</p> <p>(iv) predict as anticipation based on words and visuals sighted</p> <p>(v) predict the upcoming story development while viewing a movie entitled <i>UP</i>.</p> <p>(vi) retrieve specific information (key characters) from a text (film review)</p>

Table 8 (b): Overview of the learning package at WD Primary School

1. The integration of the four skills is crucial for language development, and reading skills should not be taught and practised in isolation Harmer (2007b, p. 265), for example, argues that the learning of a reading skill is often facilitated by it being integrated into tasks which deploy more than one language skills. Even though the present learning focuses were skills applicable to TSA reading, when planning the unit, tasks which prompt students to elicit and respond orally to simple survey questions were therefore included as a preparation for the reading and writing of the survey report, and a means to allow integrative use of the target language point.
2. It is noted that many reading activities students are asked to do are often what Willis & Willis (2007) would call artificial tasks (P. 142). One merit of the project work completed in this school is that the organization of the learning tasks has a strong theoretical underpinning in the task-based approach. It is gratifying to report that such a task-based orientation was originated from the teachers themselves, rather than from the HKU team. When the participants met to brainstorm the setup of the unit, the teachers suggested not only that the topic for the unit, films and film reviews, but also that the unit could end with students reading through a set of film blurbs and then vote for a choice film, which the school would eventually show towards the Christmas holiday (Note: Showing an English film before Christmas is a practice that the school had been doing in the previous years). In other words, the end outcome of students' reading activities was a vote by the students (Task 5 in Appendix 7a), for the most popularly chosen film, which eventually led to the film show. Such an outcome, because it is a non-linguistic, real-world outcome, was definitely in line with the notion of a task-based approach (Willis, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2007).
3. The second merit of the project in the WD Primary School is the issue of text authenticity (Hedge, 2000, p.68; Willis, 1996, p. 69.) When texts were considered, the teachers justifiably suggested the use of the real blurbs on the DVDs of children films, DVDs which are purchasable in Hong Kong. At the end, because many of these blurbs on the DVDs would be too difficult for primary students, the team resorted to downloading and adapting blurbs from the Internet (See Appendix 7b for blurbs).
4. Another sound pedagogical principle which was upheld in the organization of the learning tasks (e.g. Tasks 1 and 5) was the

personalization of the language used in the activities (Hedge, 2000, p. 274). For example, to give meaning to the reading and the writing of the survey report, students were asked to elicit from each other whether certain films have been seen or not and if these were judged to be good films. (See Appendix 6(b)) Students interviewed at the completion of the project agreed that eliciting other's evaluation and preference of films was an interesting activity.

5. The structure of a survey report was justifiably made as a learning objective because learners' knowledge of formal schema, as Hudson (2007, p. 179) argues, facilitates second language reading. Although prediction is not a key construct in the TSA reading tests, it is, however, regarded as a very important reading skill. Harmer (2007a), for example, in his discussion of the six Reading Principles argued for its importance, and listed it as Principle No. 4: "Prediction is a major factor in reading." (P. 101). The decision on the inclusion of these two specific key reading strategies/skills was also empirically justified through a needs investigation conducted in WD Primary School prior to the commencement of the project. The participating teachers of the school were provided by the HKU team with a bilingual (in both Modern Standard Chinese and English) Reading Strategy Survey form adapted from Hedgcock & Ferris (2009, p. 151-152) (Appendix 5). The teachers administered the survey to all Primary 6 students (N=112). The tally of the survey results showed that in fact these two strategies, together with two other reading strategies, were reported by most Primary 6 students as strategies which were "Never used" or which they "Do not know that it exists". Table 8c presents the percentage of students who reported "Never use" or "Don't know it exists".
6. In line with the Task-based approach (Willis & Willis, 2007; Willis 1996), the unit has a final outcome which mirrors strongly a real world event). Towards the end of the unit, students voted for the most interesting film. To adhere to the outcome of students' voting, the school made arrangement for all the Primary 6 students to view the film entitled UP, an animation film for which most students opted. In order to use the viewing of the film itself as a learning opportunity, worksheets were also produced to (i) assist students in their comprehending of the contents of the film (ii) to further develop the use of prediction as anticipation. Tasks were designed so that at different points in the film, viewing would be stopped and students would be prompted with questions to predict and anticipate either given by the teachers or from the worksheet.

Strategies reported by all WD Primary 6 students as “never used” or “don’t know this strategy” (N=112)	Percentage of “Never use” or “Don’t know it”
6. As I read, I ask myself questions about the text.	49.1%
12. As I read, I notice how the writer has organized information in the text.	46.2%
7. As I read, I find answers to the questions I have asked.	45.4%
5. As I read, I check my predictions by comparing them to what the text says.	41.1%

Table 8(c): Strategies reported by most WD Primary 6 students as “Never Used” or “Do not know it exists”.

#### A. Evaluation of the learning tasks in PFL Primary School

Ultimately, three sets of teaching materials were designed for the present project:

- Set 1 (Appendix 6a) – Guided comprehension tasks to help students understand the structure of spoken exchange in a contest as in the Longman reader *So You Want to be on TV?*
- Set 2 (Appendix 6b) – Vocabulary expansion tasks on occupation and jobs
- Set 3 (Appendix 6c) – Sequencing and matching tasks to prepare students for Reader's Theatre activity

The guided comprehension tasks in set 1 were found to be effective. The teachers adopted a range of teaching techniques to involve students’ participation in the learning process while going through the story. The use of the video clip retrieved from the YouTube showing the beginning of a talent show was used effectively by the teacher to prompt anticipation and predict, and to elicit occupation words such as “presenter”, and “contestant”.

The teachers included the playing of the rhymes and songs given in the CD ROM during the lessons. In the post-lesson reflection, the teacher expressed that the use of the e-book (CD-ROM) had actually interrupted the natural flow of the lesson. The HKU team tended to agree to this observation.

It was a pity that due to time constraint of the teaching schedule, Set 2 and Set 3

materials were not tried out. Also, the tasks were considered too difficult for the weaker classes in the school. Nevertheless, as reported, the teachers were positive about the outcome of the tryout of the materials in Set 1.

## **B. Evaluation of the learning tasks in WD Primary School**

The teaching package consists of 9 tasks spreading over 9 lessons. The whole teaching package can be found in Appendix 7, which includes the following documents:

- Appendix 7a - the “Flow of Learner Activities” chart which gives an overview of the learner activities and the objectives of each task;
- Appendix 7b - the detailed teaching plans and worksheets for each task;
- Appendix 7c - a PowerPoint slideshow on pronunciation of some film titles; and
- Appendix 7d - 29 selected film blurbs.

Table 9 shows the key activities in this unit of work:

Lesson 1	Task 1	Conducting a survey
Lesson 2	Task 2	Identifying the text organization of a survey report
Lesson 3	Task 3	Producing a simple survey report
Lesson 4	Task 4	Retrieving information from film blurbs
Lesson 5	Task 5	Choosing the most interesting film
Lessons 6 & 7	Task 6	Identifying features of a film review
Lessons 8 & 9	Task 7	Predicting information (pre-viewing and while-viewing a film) and Viewing the chosen film
	Task 8	Writing a film review
	Task 9	Completing a crossword puzzle
Table 9: Key learner activities in unit of work developed in WD Primary School.		

In general, very positive feedback was gathered from both the students and the teachers based on the class visits and/or from the evaluation meetings conducted. The following observations were made:

- (i) The teaching package successfully enabled the teachers to build a motivating and an interesting learning environment in class.
- (ii) A lot of interactive learning took place as the package covered not only the traditional four skills of language learning but also the presentation skills and viewing skills.
- (iii) Ample opportunities were given in the package for speaking practice.

- (iv) The package helped students to understand the organization of survey report, film blurbs, and film reviews. The work of the students (Appendix 8) revealed that they mastered the organization of different text types quite well.
- (v) The prediction task which prompted students while they were viewing the film was considered an effective means to help to develop students' reading skills and to enhance their awareness of listening and visual comprehension.

The teachers also made two specific suggestions for future considerations:

- (i) More time should be allocated for teaching the use of different tenses in writing report and film review.
- (ii) A glossary could be added at the bottom of the blurbs to help the weak students to comprehend the film blurbs.

## **VII. Findings from the project**

In sum, work for the project in the two schools has been completed successfully, and all three objectives have been met. The HKU team worked well with the teachers in the two schools to identify specific learning needs of their students, and to explore with the teacher collaboratively various teaching strategies to enhance their students' reading abilities with reference to some TSA reading skill sets. Some of the teaching and learning strategies identified to be successful include: the integration of the four skills in activities to enhance reading, the identification of text structure, the use of tables and forms to assist locating specific information, and the use of visuals (including video-clips) to prompt prediction. In addition, the following specific gains were also observed in the two schools and by the research team.

### **A. Participating Teachers**

At WD Primary School

- (i) The close collaboration between the teachers in the two primary schools and the research team allows the teachers to receive regular professional pedagogical advice on lesson planning, materials development and teaching methodologies. Although teachers have to spare tremendous extra time and effort in meeting the team every week and working on the materials on a tight schedule, they have all expressed at different stages in the project that it was a very worthy experience.
- (ii) The project was regarded by at WD Primary School as a very good experience. According to the teachers, they have seen new ways to adapt and expand the

textbook learning unit into a highly interactive and skills-integrated activity pack.

- (iii) The inclusion of various text types (survey report, film blurb, film review) in the teaching package, the teachers felt, had helped to raise their pedagogical content knowledge, including their awareness of the use of tenses in different text types and vocabulary related to film types.
- (iv) Effective strategies to enhance more effective and active learning have also been explored by teachers, in particular, on questioning techniques and on the use of pair work and group work to maximize opportunities for students' talk.
- (v) The project has enhanced the awareness of teachers on the learning needs of the weaker students. The teachers have observed the effectiveness of simple in-class activities in boosting confidence of the weaker students. In the post-lesson reflection, one teacher particularly remarked on a correct answer given a slow learner who, prior to this lesson, had never responded to any questions in class. It was observed that this particular student's answer prompted a round of applause from her classmates.
- (vi) Stimulated by the students' creative opinions on the film and film characters, teachers felt that more learning tasks with the aim of building students' creative thinking skills could be included in their teaching. They have suggested ideas such as asking students to write the story of the film with the perspectives of different film characters.
- (vii) To increase learning retention, the teachers believe it would be necessary to allocate more curriculum hours to cover the materials, to teach the language points, and to incorporate more pair and group activities of various complexity levels to generate student talk.

#### At PFL Primary School

- (viii) Teachers at PFL Primary School have learnt to be more aware of the possible different text structures in a reader. They originally approached the adopted reader as an ordinary story with a simple and direct story flow and planned to introduce the reader to students using skimming and scanning strategies. After having a detailed discussion with the research team, they came to observation that the story structure in a reader can be more complicated and may contain multiple text types.
- (ix) The successful use of various strategies, including the use of visuals and a video-clip, to arouse students' motivation and help students comprehend the complex structure of the reader was an encouraging experience to the teachers. The Internet resources to introduce new vocabulary, the design of information

gap tables for students to de-structure the story flow, and the incorporation of group discussion and class voting activity to increase students' talk and to further enhance motivation etc. have brought great stimulation to teachers for further exploration of other strategies when introducing a story to students.

- (x) Teachers have also become more aware of the possibility of building students' vocabulary (e.g. suffixes for occupation and jobs in this project) and other language skills with a short reader. It is hoped that with more curriculum hours allocated to the teaching of readers, teachers could design and develop more extended activities for learning other skills.

By the HKU research team

- (i) From the original plan of developing reading materials to be used for only a few lessons to ultimately having designed and developed a thematic and skills-integrated teaching pack, the research team has gained a valuable experience in making the package a really useful and effective one with tight collaboration with the teachers in both schools, and in particular, at WD Primary School.
- (ii) The opportunity of visiting different classes, observing how learning takes place in the tasks designed, and evaluating with students together allows the research team to secure teachers' immediate feedback on the usefulness of the materials. This is particularly important for the identification of strategies to support the weaker students.
- (iii) While teachers have demonstrated some useful delivery techniques, the team has come to realize that the time allocated for silent, independent reading in class is generally not enough. The focus of these Primary 6 students is often shifted to completion of the tasks like answering all the questions or filling in a table, rather than processing the text in greater depth. For example, at certain stages in the lessons, the activity prompts and the worksheets could have been withheld from the students so that they could be given time to skim through the whole texts (e.g. blurbs). Doing so would help to encourage students to become more aware of text as a coherent entity and its overall structure, rather than make them jump immediately to look for information fragmentarily in a text to respond to a question in the worksheet.
- (iv) The research team felt that while teachers were in general very keen to engage students in interactions which aimed to improve students' overall reading motivation, teachers were slightly more inclined to spending time on prompting the more able students to perform better. It is therefore felt that the teachers and the researchers in their lesson planning could have given more thoughts to the



needs of those learners who were considered weaker. We need to be reminded often that teachers will find greater meaning and satisfaction in what they are doing if they can find specific ways to move up the weaker learners, and this consideration should be realized strategically in both the planning and the execution stages.

- (v) It is also felt that the strategies for learner diversity could be better achieved through
  - i. The use of graded activities and tasks;
  - ii. The use of interactional strategies and questioning with students at different ability levels; and
  - iii. The more effective use of group work.
- (vi) It has also been observed that the HKU team would require quite a lot of time to establish rapport with the teachers in a school, and to understand the school including the teaching and assessment schedules, the curriculum plan, and the English level of the students. On the other hand, teachers also need time for useful collaborative enquires and explorations with the research team. More time should be allowed for the planning and implementation of the study so as to have a firm grasp of students' and teachers' needs when designing the learning materials.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

### **A. Achievements**

- (i) The success of the project is the result of a close collaboration between the teachers and the research team. The willingness of the teachers at either school to participate in regular co-plan meetings throughout the project is an important factor in the successful development of the teaching pack. The teachers are also willing to share their experience, their good practices and teaching strategies explored in this project with teachers in other schools in educational conferences.
- (ii) Both the research team and the teachers participated in the project have gained valuable experiences in the design of relevant and useful teaching materials as well as in the development of effective teaching strategies to enhance learning.
- (iii) The teachers in both schools explored, together with the HKU team, the use of a variety of teaching strategies to enhance students' reading skills and strategies. The teaching packages, which were developed in the collaboration process, would bear witness to the success of such collaboration. There was also some

evidence from the students' work and students' evaluation to indicate that students' reading skills have been enhanced as a result.

- (iv) The packages developed as an outcome can be adopted and adapted by teachers in other schools with some modifications to suit the specific needs of their own students.

## **B. Recommendations for Future Study**

- (i) Future projects of this kind should be considered very worthy given that the teachers' and students' overall evaluations of the present project have been very positive. However, there can be a stronger emphasis on the deliberate development of very specific skills with reference to TSA Reading. For example, in WD Primary School, emphasis was placed on the development of Prediction as a reading skill, as this particular skill arose as an outcome from the findings of the student survey. However, while this is an important reading skill, it is not a skill which would appear in any standardized test such as the TSA Reading.
- (ii) Teaching is to serve learning, and learning is not just about allowing the more able students to shine. Perhaps more importantly, it is about helping the less able students to move forward. Future projects of this kind should place greater emphasis on demonstrating what the teacher in a lesson can do to help move the less able students forward. This would mean the teacher should have not just a deliberated, need-addressing lesson plan at class level, but that the lesson planning should also place individual students in the heart of the matter. This can mean teacher's deliberate attempts in the lesson to identify some specific students among all students, monitoring their performances when they are on task, providing them with the appropriate scaffolding, and assessing them for the enhancement of their learning! All these, as far as possible, can be done with specific reference to the development of some specific TSA reading skills or skill sets.
- (iii) In the present project, teachers' participations in both schools were crucial in the decision-making process, especially at several key stages. However, participation tended to centre around teaching the lessons, brainstorming ideas for topics and activities, and commenting on and giving suggestions to teaching materials. In future, similar projects, greater efforts should be made to expand the participation of teachers. To achieve this, it would be ideal if, in future projects, teachers could be released from some of their everyday school duties so as to play a more active role in the project.
- (iv) Arrangements for meeting with students for a post-project evaluation could have been better coordinated. In the current study, no such arrangements were made

at PFL Primary School. Although a session was arranged at WD Primary School, the time was considered too short for a more detailed and comprehensive evaluation of students' learning.

- (v) Finally, in order to achieve the above, it is crucial that ample time should be given to all those who are participating in such a project.

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## Appendix

1. Meeting Logs - PFL Primary School
2. Lesson Observation Logs - PFL Primary School
3. Meeting Logs - WD Primary School
4. Lesson Observation Logs - WD Primary School
5. Reading Strategy Survey – WD Primary School
6. (a) Teaching Materials – PFL Primary School - Guided Reading Activities  
(b) Teaching Materials –PFL Primary School - Sorting Activities  
(c) Teaching Materials –PFL Primary School - Reader's Theatre Activities
7. (a) Teaching Package – WD Primary School - Films and Film Reviews – Activity Flow  
(b) Teaching Package –WD Primary School -Films and Film Reviews – Teaching Plans and Worksheets  
(c) Teaching Package –WD Primary School -Films and Film Reviews – Film Titles (pronunciation)  
(d) Teaching Package –WD Primary School -Films and Film Reviews – Film Blurbs
8. Sample students' work at WD Primary School