



賽馬會「知優致優」計劃

Jockey Club “Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents” Project

Short Story Writing and Appreciation

English Language Primary 4

Level 1: School-based Whole-class Teaching



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The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

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Background and Notes

The design of the learning and teaching plan reflects the actual circumstances of the particular school at the time of implementation. As it is developed and tailor-made to meet the specific cognitive and affective needs of students, all learning and teaching resources are for reference only.

When adapting the materials, curriculum, instructional and assessment modifications can be made in accordance with the diverse needs and abilities, learning styles and aspirations of students, professional competence of teachers, and gifted education development of the schools.

Teachers are strongly recommended to read the introduction, theoretical background and summary of the resource package to have a better understanding of the principles of Gifted Education and strategies for implementation.

This unit includes 1 foreword and 1 lesson plan.




With reference to our resources, educators can design suitable learning activities and implement the elements of Gifted Education, based on students' needs and interests, and teaching experience, so as to unfold students' potentials to the fullest.

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Short Story Writing and Appreciation

Grade: Primary 4

No. of Lessons (Learning Time): 3 Lessons (105 minutes in total)

Prior Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience in reading short stories - Experience in writing short stories with beginning, middle and end - Adjectives to describe the characters in a story - Forming different types of questions based on the experience of the characters in a story
Learning Objectives	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students can identify the personalities of the fictional characters through the events of a short story - Students make sense of a story in terms of personality conflicts between or among different characters <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students can analyze the fictional characters from their responses found in a specific context - Students can compose a short story with unexpected events based on the personalities or traits of the characters - Students will demonstrate their creativity through the writing tasks <p>Values and Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will develop enjoyment in writing short stories - Students become more aware of how one's personality affects one's conduct
Learning & Teaching Strategies	Role-play, Group Learning, Questioning, Self-reflection
Operation Mode of Gifted Education	Level 1: School-based Whole-class Teaching
Core Elements of Gifted Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Higher-order Thinking Skills  Creativity  Personal-social Competence

Foreword / Background

Completing a story using their own ideas is one of the learning targets that students are expected to achieve in Key Stage 2 in Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). The writing of a short story is always taught in primary schools in Hong Kong with a grammarian and teacher-centred approach because teachers put a lot of emphasis on the accuracy and the grades of the output based on the structure and the language used. Also, it is believed that students may not be able to handle the skills without teachers' explicit explanation. Students are usually expected to complete a story with the required number of words and high accuracy regarding the use of the vocabulary items and language structures. In most of the writing tasks, students in a class are expected to write a story about the same character with the same beginning. They are guided to develop their ideas with graphic organizers or a four-grid comic strip. For group writing tasks, students form into groups according to their academic performances in English Language. With the teacher-centred approach, teachers of this Project School found that students' outputs were not unique and innovative. They tended to complete the writing tasks according to the instructions, with the language structures and vocabulary items provided by the teachers.

There were five classes of Grade 4 students as the target students in the following discussion. Following the observation of the teachers, these target students showed two arrays of learning styles and performances with different characteristics and learning needs. Group A consisted of students who possessed comprehensive skills in writing. They showed high accuracy in their English Language writing. They were interested in writing and they were able to write short stories with high accuracy and logically. From teachers' understanding, they were able to express their opinions in written tasks. Group B consisted of students with limited confidence in writing English. They were anxious about making grammatical mistakes in their writing tasks. They focused more on the level of accuracy rather than expressing their ideas. Group A students were found not engaged and underachieving as they only wrote using the given structures and vocabulary items and so failed to demonstrate their skills in writing. Group B students were also found not engaged throughout the process. They showed no eagerness in participating in the writing task.

Objectives of Collaboration

To provide a platform for all students to develop their talents in whole class English Language learning, and to provide more opportunities for students with higher ability in English Language to exhibit their potential, teachers reviewed the learning and teaching approaches normally adopted in collaboration planning. Based on the observation and understanding of students' learning needs, the learning objectives and the learning foci for different groups of students were reviewed. Based on teachers' daily observation, all students possessed good observational skills. They enjoyed sharing their views on some unexpected events in their daily life. Despite their different characteristics, all students showed more engagement when they were assigned to participate in group learning tasks. Group A students demonstrated their high level of creativity when they participated in group work and Group B students were willing to express their own opinions during

their daily conversation when the topic was more relevant to their daily life. They liked expressing their own ideas verbally rather than in written form.

With diverse learning needs, teachers found that it was challenging to further improve the writing skills of the higher ability students and stimulate their creativity in writing short stories. In order to enhance the higher-ability students in developing creative ideas, and to cater for students' diverse learning needs, five teachers designed four consecutive lessons of whole-class learning experience through collaborative lesson planning and discussion with the Professional Development and School Support (PDSS) Team of Project GIFT. Lesson observations and post-lesson discussions were also conducted to evaluate the learning process and outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

1. Writing Activities for the Gifted

It has been found from different studies that highly-able students could be more engaged in learning if the process was meaningful with extension from the standard curriculum. It was suggested by Jarvis (2010) that gifted students felt frustrated when they were learning without relevant experiences. They refused to participate and to be engaged in learning tasks which were not meaningful to them. Fehrenbach (1993) also pointed out that gifted students could not demonstrate their talents due to the limited learning contents and a lack of extended learning opportunities. Extension of learning contents beyond the standard curriculum and dynamic learning activities was necessary for stimulating students with higher ability to achieve a higher quality learning result.

Ganopole (1988) emphasized that to engage students in the writing process, they should be given opportunities to focus on developing the meaning of the piece instead of putting too much effort into focusing on the accuracy of the grammar structures or spelling at the beginning of the tasks. Swan (2005) also mentioned that allowing gifted students to make their own choices during the writing process could enhance students' sense of ownership since their interests were being taken into account.

In addition, it was suggested that gifted learners monitored their comprehension more effectively than non-gifted students (Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent, & Larivee, 1993). From Karmiloff-Smith's (1992) point of view, reflection encourages one to restructure one's knowledge. Gifted students need time and room to monitor and restructure their own learning through reflection or evaluation.

2. Fostering Creativity of the Gifted Students

A positive and supportive learning environment is important for fostering students' creativity. Rollison (2005) pointed out that gifted students and highly-able students who love to generate ideas were usually being overlooked in the writing classroom with a teacher-centred approach. Amabile (1989) also suggested that most students with higher levels of creativity failed to demonstrate their potential in traditional schools. These students became underachievers given a learning process which focused more on accuracy instead of content and meaning. It was found that creative

children achieved a higher standard learning outcome when the learning environment was less restrictive (Whitmore, 1980). To foster their creativity, students with a higher level of creativity needed to learn with challenging tasks that were relevant to their experiences (Csikzentmihalyi, 1988). Cropley (1995) also stressed that teachers could foster the development of creativity in the classroom with a more cooperative style of learning, which could inspire students' divergent thinking and students' self-evaluation.

3. Learning Strategies based on Students' Characteristics

A group of students with diverse learning needs naturally involves students with different levels of readiness, learning styles, and interests. To cater for the learning diversity among students in whole-class teaching, including students with higher ability in English Language, and those with limited confidence in English Language, differentiated strategies could be adopted. With reference to Tomlinson and Hockett (2008), differentiation means using multiple ways to run through the learning process through differentiated learning strategies and content. Every student learns at their level of readiness and interests.

To engage students with limited confidence, learning strategies could be designed with a strength-based approach. According to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983), there are eight intelligences embedded in the human mind, namely linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist intelligences. If students are allowed to learn with their own strengths and learning styles, not merely will the engagement of the students be raised, their ability in English Language could also be enhanced.

Learning and Teaching Strategies

It was agreed that a student-centered approach would be implemented to encourage the development of a more welcoming and dynamic environment which could stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and the personal-social competence of Group A students. Its aim was that all students would be more engaged and would show more interest in writing short stories. The learning content and process would also be differentiated according to the needs of students. By the end of the learning process, all students should be able to develop a short story with unexpected events based on the traits of different characters chosen while they could also demonstrate their creativity in story writing. They would be able to evaluate and give suggestions about the stories to their peers in different areas/perspectives, such as the level of strangeness and creativity.

Group A students would be able to complete some extended tasks, which required them to develop a short story with a higher level of originality, a wider range of vocabulary items and sentence structures. They would be able to involve events in their stories with unusual, innovative, and unique ideas. They were also expected to elaborate the events of their stories through speeches with more detailed descriptions of the setting. On the other hand, Group B students would be more engaged in the writing task. They would write more and make use of the appropriate vocabulary

items and sentence structures when describing the events in the story. They would also be able to evaluate the stories of their peers written according to the uniqueness of the events..

The strategies adopted are summarized as follows:

1. Extensive Writing Experiences

In order to provide a more extensive writing experience for students with different needs, the teachers and Project GIFT developed a series of lessons based on a theme of strange stories. With the aim to raise students' interest, they were asked to write "A Short Strange Story". This topic would be more interesting to students who were strong in observation skills and who always looked forward to some unexpected events or surprises in daily life. The focus of the writing experience was shifted from the accuracy of spelling and language structures to the development of story contents. Some familiar stories with additional unexpected events were provided for students to read as a pre-writing activity. Students went through the process of characterisation in groups by analysing the fictional characters based on their speeches, thoughts, actions, and the effects of the actions taken. Students explained the development of the story events given the personalities or traits identified. After that, they were provided with opportunities to make predictions about the characters and events found in a specific context. It was expected Group A students would be able to go through all the activities with room for ongoing stimulation of higher-order thinking skills which further inspired and nurtured their creative thinking. Open-ended prompts and challenging materials would be given to expose them to more mature thinking, and to elevate their contribution to a logical yet creative piece of writing with the application of advanced language and rhetorical skills.

2. Promoting Students' Creativity – Student Empowerment

To allow students to exhibit their creativity throughout the learning process, the teacher developed a positive and supportive learning environment with a more student-centered approach. Teachers provided more choices and resources which were relevant to students' experiences and prior knowledge of the characters. Students were given sufficient time to brainstorm and they were encouraged to express their ideas in different ways.

In addition, one of the major elements was students' sense of ownership of the learning process. Students could make their own choices when they composed their writing in groups or individually. They could decide the characters involved, the levels of achievement in various learning tasks, and the work allocation among group members according to their strengths and learning styles. Students could present their story ideas in the form of spoken, written or multimodal texts, or through performative means of their own choices. Group A students were encouraged to give explanations and supporting details for their answers. Students exercised their imagination to produce novel ideas in the form of spoken, written or multimodal texts, or through performative means.

3. Catering for Learning Diversity - Differentiation

Basically, all students were expected to move from peer discussion to the writing of a short story in groups, then individually. Sharing their ideas verbally by using the target sentence structures and vocabulary items allowed students with limited confidence to participate. After that, students experienced the personality and traits of different characters through role-play. This also enabled Group B students to speak up. For Group A students, they could develop their higher-order thinking skills through analyzing the behavior or the styles of the characters. Appropriate instructions or guidance was given by the teacher throughout the learning process. Different levels of achievement were given as options to students during different learning tasks. Students of different characteristics were encouraged to do some reflection after each session of teaching as this might help them regulate their own learning.

Discussion

1. Evidence of Learning

Throughout the learning process, evidence of learning was observed. All students displayed their interests in writing the short strange stories and shared the enjoyment during the writing experience. Their excitement through the learning process was apparent and shown in their laughter and smiles.

Group B students showed more involvement in the writing process. They showed more willingness to participate in the activities, for example, role playing of different characters. They wrote more than expected and were able to make use of appropriate vocabulary items and sentence structures when describing the story events. They also made some comments on the stories composed by their peers.

Group A students were able to write with a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures. The unexpected events in the stories were developed based on the traits of the characters of the story. They were also able to build their stories and particular characters with supporting details such as dialogues, particular adjectives, and different structures instead of mere descriptions. They also exhibited a unique set of story events in their stories. During the role-play activities, they were able to imagine and play the roles of the characters in the given context, and exhibit the personality of the characters through dialogues and physical actions. They were also encouraged to reflect on their own learning after each lesson, so that they could regulate their own learning experience.

There were unexpected performances and outcomes displayed by the students. All students exhibited great creativity by displaying the personality of their characters through dialogue, responses and behaviors towards different events. The range of variety of the story content became wider and some were beyond teachers' expectations. For example, a student developed a story with a setting of a few characters of different personalities, such as Doraemon meeting Mr. Bean in the Jurassic Era and Mr. Bean meeting a fairy.

2. Roles of Teachers

Given the different classrooms and learning needs of the students, teachers were facilitators throughout the learning process. A more student-centred approach allowed students to experience the learning process with a more stimulating environment. The teachers elicited students' prior knowledge and ideas through different levels of questioning. They also promoted a positive and supportive environment for students to learn with less emphasis on the accuracy of the writing task. Group A students had more room to generate innovative ideas with extended resources beyond the textbook, different levels of guidance, and dynamic learning activities. Their skills in English writing and creativity could be further stretched in this way. The teachers had also created an interactive learning environment through the implementation of activities, for example, role-play and group writing task, to enhance the learning of all students, including Group B students.

3. Challenges and Suggestions

After this learning and teaching experience using a student-centred approach with different strategies, both teachers and students were impressed, especially by the detailed description of unexpected events in the story. Since the time for students to spend on creating their own stories was limited, for future planning, less time could be allocated to introduce a story about, say, Snow White since it is a familiar story to all students. Both students and teachers may find it uncomfortable at the beginning of the first lesson since it is a new way of learning for all of them. Teachers are encouraged to implement similar strategies in daily learning and teaching so that both teachers and students can get used to the learning environment. Since much time has been spent on developing new resources for this newly-implemented student-centred approach, it is suggested that a learning community among teachers can help apply, evaluate, and improve in the future. Both teachers and students can benefit from this learning and teaching experience.