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**Impacts of infusing affective education and gifted education elements into letter writing lessons with scaffolding and differentiated strategies**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Considering gifted education as encompassing both "education for the gifted" and "talent development" for all students, the HKSAR government put forth a 3-tier implementation framework for gifted education provision in Hong Kong (Education Department, 2000). The framework depicted Level 1 provision as a school-based approach within regular classroom with enriched curriculum to develop all students' high-order thinking skills, creativity, and personal-social competence, as well as to modify subject contents to meet the needs of high ability students in regular classrooms. However, how these elements can be effectively incorporated into pedagogical practice and facilitate students' learning received only limited attention. With the support provided by the **Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project** (Project GIFT) which is funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the current study aims to explore how our Chinese writing unit integrated these elements of gifted education and strengthen students' writing performance.

Our design of a Chinese writing unit was integrated with affective education and infused of high-order thinking skills, creativity, and personal-social competence, and elements derived from differentiated education, scaffolding, and theory of multiple intelligences. We implemented our designed curriculum unit at Grade 3 level, a critical learning stage for students' development of writing ability. Students at this grade level start to learn how to write passages with the basic knowledge of sentence and paragraph structures. Five classes of Grade 3 students participated in this study.

In this writing unit, the main writing topic was "A reply letter to dad and mom" for students to learn how to write a reply letter to their dad or mom to express their gratitude for their parents' love and care. Before writing the reply letter to parents, the 5 classes of students were divided into the experimental group (3 classes) and the control group (2 classes). Comparison of group differences could help determine the effectiveness of scaffolding on students' writing. Students were first provided with a writing task "A letter to someone in the school" to learn about the structure of a letter and how to write a letter to a target person. Supportive scaffolding was provided to students in the experimental groups. They were first guided to choose a letter correspondent in the school. Students chose the similar correspondents formed into groups (i.e., differentiated strategy grouping) and discussed the dedication of the correspondent and how they could express their gratitude to him/her. Sample sentences were provided to illustrate how to organize the structures for this kind of writing.

After learning how to write a letter, 5 classes of students were asked to write a reply letter to their dad or mom who had responded to the teacher's request to write a letter to their child. In fact, it was a Chinese writing task integrated with affective education. Before writing the reply letter to dad or mom, students were asked to share and discuss how they could feel parents' love from daily lives. This activity was arranged to stimulate students' high-order thinking, to help them understand their parents' love and care, to arouse their' positive feelings and emotions towards their parents, and to strengthen their personal-social competence. Teachers also made use of movies and songs to help them appreciate their

parents' love and learn how to express their gratitude to their parents. Such comprehensive learning activities were adapted to students' visual-spatial and musical intelligences. Finally, students were asked to unleash their creativity and write a reply letter after reading the letter from their parents.

Student questionnaire survey and teacher's observation were used to evaluate students' learning. The after-class self-report data showed that students in the experimental group were more confident in writing a letter ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ) compared to the control group ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), and they generally agreed that the writing task with scaffolding was helpful in improving their writing skills ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). More than 50% students from both experimental and control groups liked the introduction of videos and music to help them appreciate parents' love and agreed that the comprehensive learning activities could motivate them to reflect on their feelings towards parents deep inside their hearts. Teacher's observations also supported the effectiveness of these enriched writing tasks incorporating elements of gifted education: (1) scaffolding can assist students to better understand the structure of a letter and grasp the skills of writing, such as using richer vocabulary and sophisticated sentence structure; (2) affective elements can boost students' writing motivation and help students express their feelings naturally and sincerely in writing the letters; (3) differentiated strategy grouping enables students within the groups to make in-depth discussions; (4) adoption of multiple intelligences theory provide students with preferred learning style, which in turn enhance their engagement and self-confidence.

The infusion of core elements of gifted education together with the strategies of scaffolding and differentiation have been proved helpful in improving students' motivation and performance in writing a letter, especially during the initial stage of learning new skills and concepts. It is suggested that these elements and teaching pedagogies be integrated into other subject learnings in the regular classrooms.

**KEYWORDS:**

Differentiation; Hong Kong; Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project; letter writing; scaffolding; school-based gifted education



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