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**G1-OP-18****Integration of gifted education elements into an English writing lesson and strengthening students' engagement and learning through differentiated strategies**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The gifted education policy in Hong Kong advocates the infusion of high-order thinking skills, creativity, and personal-social competence into all regularly classroom learning as a school-based gifted education provision (Education Department, 2000). To integrate these three elements into a regular English language classroom, it is important for teachers to design appropriate activities to address students' learning needs and engage them in the learning process. However, it was found that in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, teachers mainly emphasized students' language accuracy and ignored the importance of students' engagement and the development of high-order thinking skills, creativity, and personal-social competence. There also lacked related evidence regarding the practical way and effectiveness of incorporating elements of gifted education into the ESL classrooms. In collaboration with and supported by the **Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project** (Project GIFT), which is funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to promote school-based talent development and gifted education in Hong Kong, Ma On Shan Methodist Primary School has the opportunity to explore how to engage students in learning to achieve learning objectives through differentiated strategies and integrating gifted education elements into the ESL classes. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of using differentiated strategy grouping and differentiated assignments in developing students' high-order thinking skills, collaborative skills, creativity, and in enhancing students' English writing ability.

Four English Language subject teachers with the support from gifted education specialists of Project GIFT designed the English writing lesson through collaborative lesson planning and discussion. Lesson observation with checklist and post-lesson discussion were conducted to evaluate the learning process and outcomes. Four ESL classes of Grade 4 students participated in the study. All students were second language learners of English, varying in their English proficiency, multiple intelligences, interests, and learning styles. The core learning objectives of the lesson were to develop students' skills in writing a story, especially their ability in composing a story following logical sequence and their proficiency in using appropriate adjectives to describe feelings of the characters.

At the beginning of the lesson, students were asked to use adjectives to describe the feelings of Mr. Bean, a well-known TV program character, when he was facing different situations. Through this learning activity, teachers assessed and consolidated students' knowledge and proficiency in using adjectives to describe the feelings from their verbal answers. Afterwards, a story about Mr. Bean was introduced for students to read and identify the setting of the story. Picture cards, a diagram of 6W thinking skills, or guiding questions were provided to students of diverse English ability to help them complete the task. Then, students were asked to develop the story by working in groups of four with homogeneous ability grouping. To enhance students' skills in developing logical prediction for the story, story map was introduced. Students were also required to use appropriate adjectives to describe the feelings of Mr. Bean in their newly created situation. Differentiated instruction with various guiding questions were

provided to different groups during the learning process based on students' organizational skills. Students were also encouraged to use their preferred formats to demonstrate or present their outputs according to their own interests and strengths. Students with high visual-spatial intelligence illustrated their ideas through drawings, accompanying simple descriptions; those strong in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence performed a mini drama; those with higher verbal-linguistic intelligence presented their ideas through a piece of short writing without the use of the story map. Peer and teacher rating were used to evaluate students' performance. Finally, all students had to put their ideas and created their story endings in writing.

Lesson observation with checklist by teachers and post-lesson interview with students were conducted to examine the effectiveness of the differentiated strategies applied. Both teachers' observation and feedback from students supported the effectiveness of the differentiated strategies in engaging students. Students' feedback confirmed their positive attitude in learning and their high level of engagement in creating and writing story endings. Students' engagement in learning was evident especially when teachers sought to provide guidance and support which aligned with students' ability and learning needs. By allowing students to present their ideas and products in own ways, their creativity was unlocked. Group learning tasks tailored to students with homogeneous learning ability created an interactive and engaging learning environment and helped students develop their high-order thinking skills and personal-social competence. It was also found that, after applying the differentiated strategies within the class, students were able to transfer their previously learnt knowledge to the writing lessons. Some of them were capable to discover the connections between the imaginary situations of the story and their daily life experiences.

This study provided a practical example of promoting students' engagement and learning with the integration of core elements of gifted education in the English writing classrooms in primary schools. Differentiated strategies not only cater for the diverse learning needs of students in meeting the key learning objectives, but also enrich the English learning experiences regarding learning adjectives and writing skills.

**KEYWORDS:**

Differentiated strategies; English writing; Hong Kong; Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project; English Second Language education; school-based gifted education



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