



Success is the sum of small efforts

▲ Left to right: Ms WONG Mei-chu, Ms KONG Kit-yi, Ms LIU Qianzhao



Teaching Philosophy

" 'Many small streams make one big river.' With persistence and concerted efforts, a team of dedicated teachers taking tiny steps towards building an authentic English learning culture in their school has proven a big success in transforming the school culture and raising students' English standard. At Ning Po College, the team of English teachers named their efforts 'CHANCE'. "



Teachers presented with the Award

Ms KONG Kit-yi
(Years of Teaching: 25)

Ms WONG Mei-chu
(Years of Teaching: 9)

Ms LIU Qianzhao
(Years of Teaching: 4)

School

Ning Po College

Subjects taught

English Language (S1-6)

Interview with the Teachers

Mini-strategies in the classroom that trigger off the butterfly effect in reshaping students' attitude and performance in English



▲ Mini-debates as regular lunchtime activities

The journey begins with small steps

"We never want to surrender to the reality that our students, the majority of which come from grass-root families with little chance to be exposed to English in a Chinese-medium school, could not learn good English," said Ms Wong, the Chairperson of the English Panel at Ning Po College. Instead, the team of English teachers has decided to give their students a chance; a chance for them to build the competence in mastering English. They start off with the most basic step: to nurture students with proper study habits, build up their confidence in using English. Once students have acquired basic language awareness, they would be provided with opportunities to become independent learners, and the whole learning cycle would be propelled by students themselves. That's why they call this reform "CHANCE": (Confidence, Habit, Awareness, New experiences, Challenge and Empowerment).

The teachers, who have "big" hearts, dare to dream "big". The first step they take is to start training students in English speaking. "We do what the primary school kids do; we read aloud together in the class for five minutes every day. In this way, even the students who are poor in English speaking would feel comfortable reading aloud in a group." Ms Wong continued, "The reading materials we choose, such as poetry and scripts, really motivate our students to learn." The training in speaking is followed by free writing on a regular basis. Free writing allows students to write worry-free, without the frustration of making mistakes. "It wasn't easy for us in the beginning," admitted Ms Kong. Their efforts soon paid off. With teachers' encouragement to write freely, students are now keen on writing, not afraid of making mistakes anymore.

Motivating less able students to learn English has been an important goal for the teachers at Ning Po. "Whenever students with stronger abilities dominate in the class, the weaker ones tend to remain silent and muddle through. That's why we often assign different roles to students, shifting their duties from time to time, so that everybody in the class gets a chance to play a major role in learning activities," said Ms Kong. Often, students are given ample time to prepare for class in advance in the form of pre-learning activities, which helps learners feel more secure and ready to participate in classroom activities.

"We ask all the students to speak English in class and even after lessons," said Ms Wong. "They may not be able to speak the language properly in the beginning. But that's totally fine, as long as they are willing to take the first step to speak English."

As a teacher of an S1

▲ Regular panel discussions are held to plan and evaluate the effect of new strategies

► The 15-day Summer English Immersion programme is becoming increasingly popular among lower form students



◀ Learning English through interactive drama activities.

▼ Teachers motivate student to learn English through different ways.

class, Ms Liu, has gone as far as having all the class duties performed in English. "My students are now so used to conversing with me in English," Ms Liu smiled with a sense of fulfillment. These tiny steps, as the teachers called them the mini-strategies, have shaped up students' confidence in using English. "We know that if we deal with all problems at one time, it simply won't work," admitted Ms Wong. "So, we opt for small steps; it may take longer time to reach the goals, but we hope students would stay in the path longer, as we walk with them hand in hand."

Full immersion in English

"Parents often tell us how impressed they are when they see their children immersing in the world of English learning," Ms Kong expressed. Over the years, students have become more eager to take up challenges in English activities.

Participation rate has soared in most English-related extra-curricular activities, such as Halloween Party, English Easter Camp, English Outing, Public Debating Contests and many other events. "The students engaged in the competitive English activities

may not necessarily be the ones who score better academically, but they are willing to take up challenges, working hard to master English as a second language. We truly appreciate their positive attitude," Ms Kong commented.

Teachers united on a shared sense of mission

The changes brought by "CHANCE" never came easily, all three teachers admitted. In the first year of implementing the reform, some students in the school showed a bit reluctance to accept the change. "It won't



be possible if we, the three determined pioneers, did not have so much faith in this reform." Ms Kong said. Indeed, the reform has brought about a big increase in workload for the teachers in terms of lesson preparation. Despite the increased workload, the teachers believe that the change and improvement found in students is worth every bit of their efforts. "In the beginning, it was tough.

But we persevere and stay determined on our path. The small steps have soon built upon themselves, and have created a sort of snowball effect." Ms Wong explained. They find that their efforts have paid off when they witness a change in their students. "For example a few years ago, students relied on the script that I prepared for

them during presentation of the bi-weekly English morning talk. Now they are more self-assured and have improved so much that they can write their own script. I play the role of a facilitator only. This explains why the workload incurred by the reform will even out in the long run." Ms Liu elaborated. Down the road ahead, the teachers aim to continue their "CHANCE" reform and continue to explore more new tactics, provide more challenges and learning experiences so as to enable their students to reach a higher pedestal in English learning.



▲ Guests and experts are observing how effective teaching strategies can be conducted in real classrooms

Teachers' Sharing

We have a very deep-rooted belief in education. If students can develop "confidence" and form good learning "habits", they will be able to perform satisfactorily. If students who have potential want to excel in their English Language, developing their language "awareness" will be an essential step. If students can be provided with "new" learning experiences, stimulated and "challenged" in authentic settings and culture of the language, they can be "empowered" to sustain improvement and the learning cycle by themselves. Then, they will be the ultimate winner in the battle of English Language learning.

Conceptual framework – CHANCE

"CHANCE" is the six necessary stages for developing our students into proficient language learners possessing both confidence and competence. They include: **Confidence; Habit; Awareness; New experiences; Challenge; Empowerment.** With this development model, all panel members can stay clear-minded of where we are all heading towards and aiming at, achieving success in our teaching.

Confidence: building students' confidence

To build up students' confidence in using English, we decided to start off by developing students' speaking abilities with "5-min reading aloud time". It involves reading aloud of literary texts ranging from poems to scripts for role play. Reading aloud has been incorporated into every English lesson as a panel policy. As a result of this strategy, even the weakest students are motivated to learn as it removes the threat

of the lack of vocabulary and what students need to do is simply read aloud and enjoy the beauty of the language.

The subsequent step to the "reading aloud" activity is "10-min speaking activities". As language teachers, we clearly understand that the stronger or more active students will dominate while weaker students will remain silent in speaking activities which lack careful planning. We have therefore introduced the following "mini strategies" as part of our classroom strategies to ensure that students can actively take part in every class and feel secure to participate in classroom activities. This is done not only through the policy of the complete use of English by students and teachers but also by promoting the use of group work, pair work and role-assigning practice. This allows students to be engaged in accomplishing a task in English and boosts participation rate by easing their stress of making mistakes in front of classmates. Peer learning has greatly increased students' sense of security in making new attempts in learning English.

Equal emphasis on reading aloud and speaking is put in extra-curricular activities so as to maximise students' opportunities in English learning and confidence building. A number of activities have been organised both inside and outside the school, such as in-house radio broadcasts, programme recording with RTHK, Speech Festival and Study Tours to Singapore.

With all the teachers' effort, over the years, a number of students have volunteered to take part in at least one of the above, in which students could use English for authentic purposes.

Habits: sustaining students' learning by habit formation

As the confidence building strategies start to achieve results and students start to form good learning habits, their learning is further sustained by learning processes,

▼ Students get empowered by leading English activities



◀ New experiences enable students to gain recognition

such as participation in mini projects, through which students familiarise themselves with co-operative learning strategies, such as peer-learning, presentation in groups. These learning processes can enable students to form independent learning habits that are vital to facilitate lifelong learning. In order to sustain students' commitment on a regular basis, free-writing is also introduced to encourage students to write in authentic situations. This strategy can help students overcome the hurdle of writing by encouraging them to develop the habit of free writing.

Awareness: raising students' language awareness

5-min SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) Teaching is implemented to reinforce students' understanding of common sentence patterns. Students' language awareness is further raised through the 10-min Mental Processing Time, which offers regular bite-size reading and mini reading tasks during class time. These activities can help students grasp the basic fabrics of the English Language.

To enhance students' awareness in the English Language, both language arts and non-language arts components are integrated into different parts of our formal curriculum. Students are well exposed to different elements of the English Language curriculum, including poems, songs, short stories and drama during class hours. Debate is also piloted and has received great responses from students.

New experiences, Challenges and Empowerment

As students are getting more ready to move up the

ladder and take on even higher challenges, a wide variety of English activities and inter-school competitions and opportunities for them to take on roles of organisers are provided. These serve as "New experiences" and "Challenges" that stimulate students and keep them engaged and motivated. The last stage of "Empowerment" emphasises the importance for learners to operate freely in real-life communicative situations

and be able to appreciate different cultures through the language. Our students in higher levels are able to benefit from these provisions.



◀ Enhancing students' confidence and English culture through various activities



Throughout the last 6 years, we persist. We act together. We witness changes in the abilities of our students. Some visitors who have come to observe our lessons have made a comment - it's a miracle. But the miracle of English learning at Ning Po College does not have one single ground-breaking initiative. It is just a snowball of mini strategies multiplying the effect as it rolls across these years. It is just a story with teachers' joint effort and blind faith on a series of small steps that bring about a major improvement.





Assessment Summary

Raising students' English standard through an effective language curriculum plan titled "CHANCE"



▲ Students engaged in quality interaction

The awardees have led the English Panel in the school to devise a six-stage plan to develop the basic English competence of their students and raise English standard in their CMI (Chinese as a medium of instruction) school since 2009. The design of their plan is underpinned by a conceptual framework called CHANCE (Confidence, Habit formation, Awareness, New experiences, Challenges, Empowerment), which guides the setting of learning objectives for each stage of language development. The CHANCE framework has succeeded in facilitating students' language learning and enhancing their English Language communicative competencies.

A range of well designed resources and teaching materials are used to develop students' confidence, encourage good habit formation, raise language awareness and promote communicative language learning in the school. A reading culture is promoted by adapting different text types from various literary/imaginative sources to enable learners to acquire effective reading skills and form good reading habits. The effective implementation of the school reading programme, establishment of classroom routines conducive to good habit formation, and a learner-centred curriculum have succeeded in nurturing students to be capable of independent learning. Students learn and make progress according to their abilities and pace, and make steady improvement in their command of the English Language. An array of extra-curricular activities is in place to give ample opportunities for students to practise English in authentic situations. Through the promotion of integrative use of language in various activities and a wide range of learning experiences like the use of mini projects and free writing/ journal writing, students' self-learning habits are nurtured and communicative competence enriched. Strategic planning and timely implementation of these effective learning activities not only promote collaborative skills and co-operative learning among students, but also enable students to

achieve personal, intellectual development and cultural understanding.

The teachers have succeeded in changing the school culture and devised exemplary teaching practices based on their conceptual framework titled CHANCE. Through the continuous efforts of the teachers, a school language policy has gradually been formulated, in which the use of English is promoted both inside and outside the classroom. The whole school approach to promote an integrated use of language through different learning experiences has proved to be effective in supporting students' language development. The teachers are highly dedicated to their work and have demonstrated excellent collaboration in building up a motivating learning environment that improves the quality of education for their students.

The awardees have been disseminating the school's initiatives and good practices to parents and the public through forums and seminars. They work with staff members in their school to promote professional development. Their efforts have led to a positive and harmonious school culture in which teachers work collaboratively for a common goal.



Ways to Obtain Information on the Teaching Practice



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