

Using Speaker's Meeting as a platform to develop speaking and leadership skills at P6 level

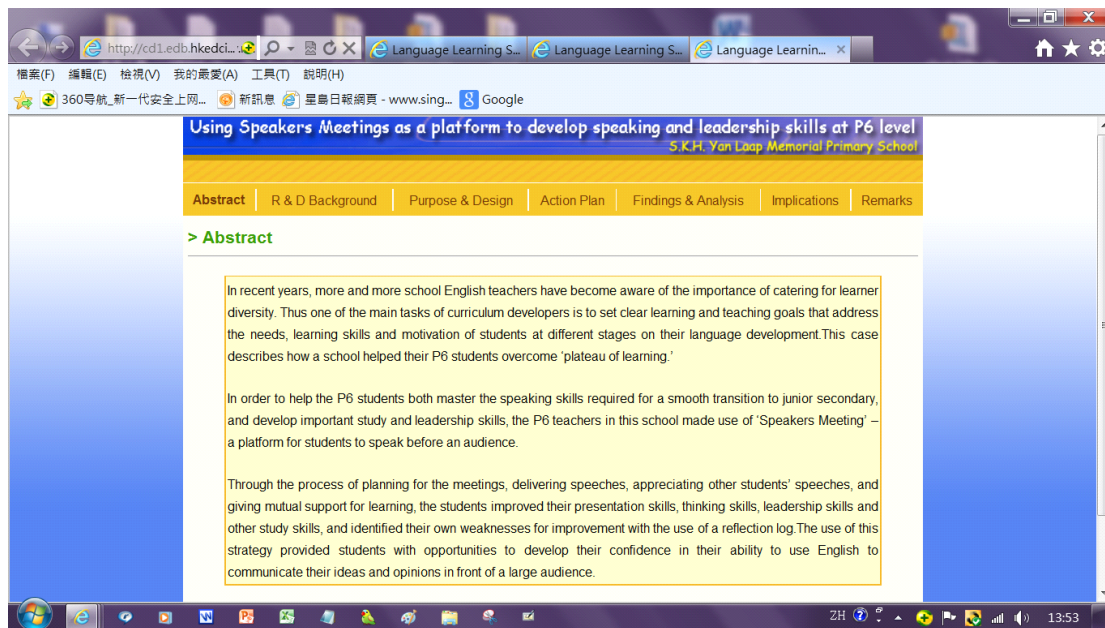
## School-based project report

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Uploaded in 2009 on LLSS website

Accessed 31 May 2014

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In recent years, more and more school English teachers have become aware of the importance of catering for learner diversity. Thus one of the main tasks of curriculum developers is to set clear learning and teaching goals that address the needs, learning skills and motivation of students at different stages on their language development. This case describes how a school helped their P6 students overcome 'plateau of learning.'

In order to help the P6 students both master the speaking skills required for a smooth transition to junior secondary, and develop important study and leadership skills, the P6 teachers in this school made use of 'Speakers Meeting' – a platform for students to speak before an audience.

Through the process of planning for the meetings, delivering speeches, appreciating other students' speeches, and giving mutual support for learning, the students improved their presentation skills, thinking skills, leadership skills and other study skills, and identified their own weaknesses for improvement with the use of a reflection log. The use of this strategy provided students with opportunities to develop their confidence in their ability to use English to communicate their ideas and opinions in front of a large audience.

### R & D Background

*Plateau of learning* is a term used to describe a phenomenon in the process of learning a new skill when a learner

makes no perceptible progress in spite of efforts and practice (Collins et al, 1973). In English language learning, Richards (2008) attributed the phenomenon to learner characteristics. He thinks that a learner fails to make progress across levels owing to those problems such as persistent fossilized language errors, or a gap in terms of language productive or receptive competence. Fan (2011) subscribes to Entwistle's (1983) emphasis on the value of new stimuli to learners to keep them motivated in learning, and argues that productive work is more meaningful to overcome plateau in English learning. To follow this line of thinking, teachers should set suitably challenging tasks to stimulate or sustain the interest and ambition of the learners to work harder and achieve more.

As many of the P6 students are in the range of average and more able levels, and are capable of speaking clearly and fluently, teachers of this school determined to set strategic learning goals to stretch their students' potential and help them overcome their language learning plateau.

The teachers felt that games and simple communicative activities which made students at KS1 (Primary 1-3) curious and motivated could no longer serve as stimuli to sustain the interest of these P6 students. Given the fact that the students seemed to have the potential to manage more challenging tasks and gain greater satisfaction in English learning, the teachers were looking for a practical pedagogical strategy to guide the P6 students to jump beyond their language plateau and make further progress, hence their decision to choose public speaking as a focus of skills development in P6.

Public speaking is an empowerment strategy to nurture confident and competent speakers (Lucas, 1989, Payne & Carlin, 1994, Beebe & Beebe, 2009).? Students giving speeches on a public occasion as a regular activity can benefit in the following ways:

Learning in the classroom: Good experience in public speaking will reduce students' fear of expressing their ideas in front of others, and students will have confidence to ask teachers questions or convey their thoughts in class.

Cooperative and collaborative learning: Students who can express themselves in the classroom will participate in group work more actively because they can speak clearly and confidently.

Character building: Students who normally shy away from social activities will become more outspoken and confident as they have more opportunities to interact with others spontaneously.

On the whole, there are good reasons to introduce public speaking in classes as it gives all round benefits in various domains of education: academic, social skills development, and whole-person development.

The teachers also felt that good presentation and public speaking skills would also enable the students to tackle reading aloud, interaction and mini-presentations in TSA tasks at KS2. The skills acquired will also be useful for students to adapt to a possible change in the medium of instruction in secondary school.

Therefore, the teachers believed that promoting public speaking could be a new stimulus for P6 students to aim higher.

## Purpose & Design

<b>I Topic</b>	Using 'speakers meetings' as a platform to develop speaking and leadership skills at P6 level
<b>II Purpose of the study</b>	<p>The teachers decided to launch 'Speakers Meetings' in P6 classes. In this 'Speak to Learn' project, Speakers Meetings are used to provide a platform for students to speak before an audience so as to learn to deliver speeches, appreciate other speeches, and give mutual support for learning. By building up this platform, the teachers expected their students to learn and improve their presentation skills, higher order thinking skills, leadership skills, reflective learning.</p> 
<b>III Strategies used</b>	<p>The design of Speakers Meetings was based on the format used by <i>Toastmasters International</i> (an international organization that promotes leadership through public speaking). A toastmasters meeting 'is a learn-by-doing workshop in which participants hone their speaking and leadership skills in a friendly atmosphere. A typical group has 20-40 members who meet weekly, biweekly or monthly. A typical meeting lasts 60- 90 minutes.' (<a href="http://www.toastmasters.org/">http://www.toastmasters.org/</a>)</p> <p>Prior to the start of the project, the students were trained to perform different roles.</p> <p><b>Agenda</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>S.K.H. Yan Laap Memorial Primary School</b> <b>Speakers Meeting</b> <b>Our motto: Today' s speakers, tomorrow' s leaders</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b> <b>Time:</b> <b>Venue:</b></p> <p><b>Theme:</b></p>

Duration (minutes)	Activity	Name/ class
1	<b>Opening</b> (welcome the audience and inform them of the theme, introduce the MC)	Chair
3	<b>Introduction of the Programme</b> (speak on the theme, introduce the different roles in this meeting, invite speaker 1 to start)	MC
	<b>Prepared Speech part</b>	
	<b>(1 minute of silence between prepared speeches)</b>	
1 -1.5	<b>Speech 1</b>	Speaker 1
1 -1.5	<b>Speech 2</b>	Speaker 2
1 -1.5	<b>Speech 3</b>	Speaker 3
1 -1.5	<b>Speech 4</b>	Speaker 4
1 -1.5	<b>Speech 5</b>	Speaker 5
	<b>(Add more if appropriate)</b>	

<b>Unprepared speech part</b>		
		1
		2
		3
		4
		5
	<b>4-5 speakers &gt; 30 sec@</b>	
<b>Peer evaluation</b>		
<b>1</b>	For speaker 1	Assessor 1
<b>1</b>	For speaker 2	Assessor 2
<b>1</b>	For speaker 3	Assessor 3
<b>1</b>	For speaker 4	Assessor 4
<b>1</b>	For speaker 5	Assessor 5
	(Add more if appropriate)	
<b>(MC hands over to Chair)</b>		
	<b>Closing Remarks</b> To share any news about the class or the Speakers Meeting To thank everybody and hope more students will speak in next meeting	Chair
<b>10</b>	<b>General remarks (Optional)</b>	Teacher

**Roles and duties for students**

Chair

- gives opening remarks and closing remarks
- practises skills related to
  - planning and implementing a meeting
  - motivating the audience at the start and
  - facilitating the overall rundown of the meeting
- uses some presentation skills when speaking in the meeting

#### MC

- introduces the programme and leads applause after each speech and introduces the next speaker
- practises skills related to
  - planning and implementing a meeting
  - motivating the audience
  - facilitating the smooth transition from one speaker to the next in the meeting
- may be the one who speaks most of the time in the meeting and thus the presentation skills are likely to improve more markedly

#### Speakers

- present a prepared speech effectively.
- make use of good presentation skills such as clear delivery, good eye contact and voice projection.
- finish the speech within 2 minutes
- try to keep composed and look confident when talking in front of an audience

#### Assessors

- give feedback to a speaker (1 assessor for 1 speaker)
- listen attentively, and apply critical thinking to assess the performance of the speaker
- give feedback in a short and concise report in the meeting. So they are speakers themselves and will also need presentation, time management, confidence building skills.

#### Audience

In each meeting, about 15 students will have an opportunity to take on a role. The rest of the class will then be the audience. These students are required to show support to all who will speak by listening attentively and completing an assessment form. They should show appreciation to the fellow students by clapping at the end of a speech presentation.

The relevant language/ thinking/ leadership skills applied by the roles in their work (the table below)

Language / thinking / leadership skills for different roles  
in a Speakers Meeting

Skills	Chair	MC	Speakers	Assessors	Audience
Planning /implementation	✓	✓			
Motivating/Facilitating	✓	✓			
Presentation	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Time management			✓		
Confidence building			✓		
Listening				✓	✓
Critical thinking				✓	
Giving feedback				✓	
Showing appreciation using body language					✓

**IV Characteristics of a Speakers Meeting**

A Speakers Meeting is an extended classroom activity built on English thematic units. The students each prepare a speech script based on a topical writing task in the unit.

Students understand that they aim at practising public speaking on this platform. It is formal and stands as a platform for 'speakers'

Teachers also provide a variety of roles in a meeting so as to enable a large number of students to speak on the occasion: Chair, MC, speakers, and assessors.

**V Assessment tools**

In this pilot run of Speakers Meetings, the teachers used the following tools to collect evidence and evaluate the effectiveness of the project:

- students' speaking performance video clips
- observation notes of teachers
- students' reflection logs
- interviews with some students
- teachers' comments and feedback recorded in a meeting

**Action Plan**

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## Try- out 1

## Try- out 2

Teaching a thematic unit:  
*Changes/Growing up*

- **Write** about your dream job
- Three lessons on **speech writing and public speaking skills**

• **First Speakers Meeting:**  
To **inform** your audience of your dream job in an interesting way



Teaching a thematic unit:  
*The magic of nature/  
Taking care of the Earth*

- **Write** about an endangered species
- A lesson on **reviewing 1st speakers meeting: skills and logistics**

• **Second Speakers Meeting:**  
To **explain** a phenomenon and persuade the audience to take action on protecting nature



### Term 1 - from writing to speaking > Speakers Meeting 1

<i>Instructional events/ activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
1. Teach a unit on 'Changes / Growing up'	
2. Students write a composition on 'My Dream Job'	
3. Teach techniques of writing a speech	<a href="#">Writing skills</a>
4. Students change the composition into a speech script	
5. Teach basic public speaking skills	<a href="#">Speaking skills</a>
6. Students practise speech making in small groups	
7. Briefing : Agenda of a Speakers Meeting, duties of roles, and basic criteria of assessing a speaker	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
8. Helping students assume different roles in a Speakers Meeting (Chair, MC, speakers, assessors)	<a href="#">Script (Chair)</a>  <a href="#">Script (MC)</a>  <a href="#">Assessor report template</a>  Assessment forms ( <a href="#">audience</a> )  <a href="#">Reflection log template</a>
9. Set up the first Speakers Meeting	<a href="#">Chair and MC clip</a>  <a href="#">Speaker clip</a>  <a href="#">Assessor clip</a>
10. Students reflect on their performance	<a href="#">Reflection log completed</a>

### Term 2 - from writing to speaking > review > Speakers Meeting 2

<i>Instructional events/ activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
1. Teach a unit on The Magic of Nature/ Taking Care of the Earth	
2. Students write a speech on 'Save the endangered animals' as a group	
3. Review the first Speakers Meeting with the class	Teacher' s feedback 1. <a href="#">plan</a> 2. <a href="#">PowerPoint</a>
4. Briefing : Agenda of the next Speakers Meeting, role allocation (Chair, MC, assessors)	
5. Hold the second Speakers Meeting Special features:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech groups: a speech is split into several parts and all members will have a time to present a part</li> <li>• Add unprepared speech part to some classes to stretch the ability of the motivated/ more able students</li> <li>• Chair and MC give creative introduction/remarks</li> <li>• Groups adopt unique techniques to attract their audience</li> <li>• Some groups use cue cards during their speech</li> <li>• Some students take a different role this time, e.g. being a speaker in the first meeting, and MC in the second meeting</li> </ul>	Assessment forms ( <a href="#">audience</a> )  Assessment Report template ( <a href="#">group assessors</a> )
6. Student reflect on learning	<a href="#">Reflection log completed</a>
7. Evaluation meeting (teachers)	

## Findings & Analysis

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After the first try-out, the teachers reviewed progress with the students and were able to feed their conclusions back into the second try-out. As a result, some positive changes were observed.

### **1. Students could express themselves clearly, confidently and competently in front of an audience**

Many students spoke like trained speakers with confidence, a big smile, and eye contact with the audience. The students could use better presentation skills to spice up their speeches in the second Speakers Meeting. Speech groups also used PowerPoint to give background information on the topic, showed a toy animal to attract the



audience, and pictures to convey their messages.



## 2. Students demonstrated leadership skills and problem solving skills in the process of preparing and hosting the activity

The students reflected on their performance by completing a reflection log. The students were able to identify the strengths and the weaknesses in their performance in the meetings and they were also eager to give a better performance in another role in the next meeting soon.

Encouraged by the teachers, the students had a free hand to plan for the next Speakers Meeting with new input and creativity. In the second Speakers Meeting, MCs could use better skills to plan and facilitate the meetings. One class had two MCs (probably because MC is a popular role). They gave an interesting opening and introduced the speakers concisely. They also played some soothing music during the one minute silence for peer assessment. In another class, the computer broke down and the PowerPoint prepared by the groups could not be played. The MCs tried to solve the problem by drawing an animal on the chalkboard for the class to guess.



Public speaking practice helped students improve critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership skills such as planning and leading in projects and in this way, they may do well in debates and school-based speaking

assessment in KS4.

### 3. Students were given an opportunity to stretch their language ability through public speaking

There was a new session of unprepared speeches in the second Speakers Meeting. This is challenging as a speech topic was disclosed in the meeting and the students were given 3 minutes to think and organize a response to the topic. After some tense moments of preparation, a number of brave students took confident steps to the platform and presented a precise speech which won the applause of the rest of the class.

A word must be mentioned about the peer assessors. Self assessment is easier for the students as they can complete the learning log after the meeting. But for peer assessors, they have to listen to a speaker, note down good points and what to be improved on the spot and within a couple minutes they had to give an oral report to the class. Although these students were provided with guidelines by the teachers, they still had to decide on relevant points to make in the report and their presentation is an unprepared one.

The unprepared speech presenters and the assessors are high fliers on their path to become effective communicators.



### Evaluation - students

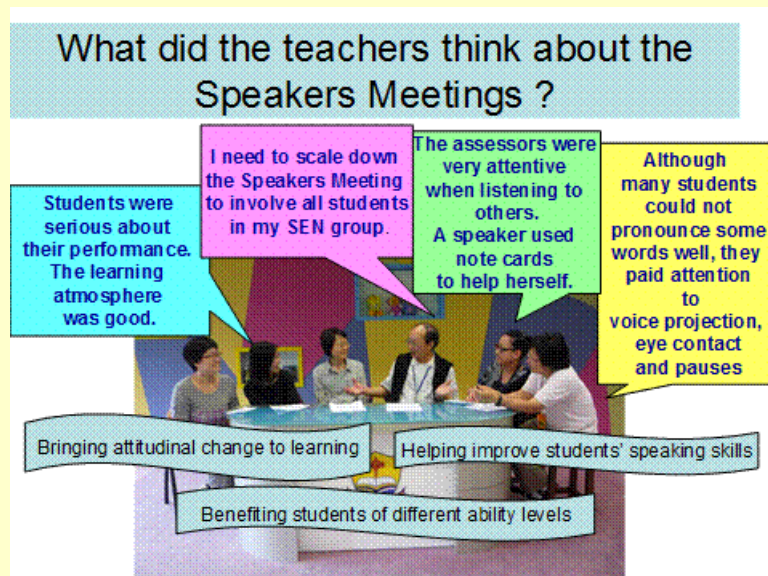
The teachers conducted group interviews with some students after the second Speakers Meeting.



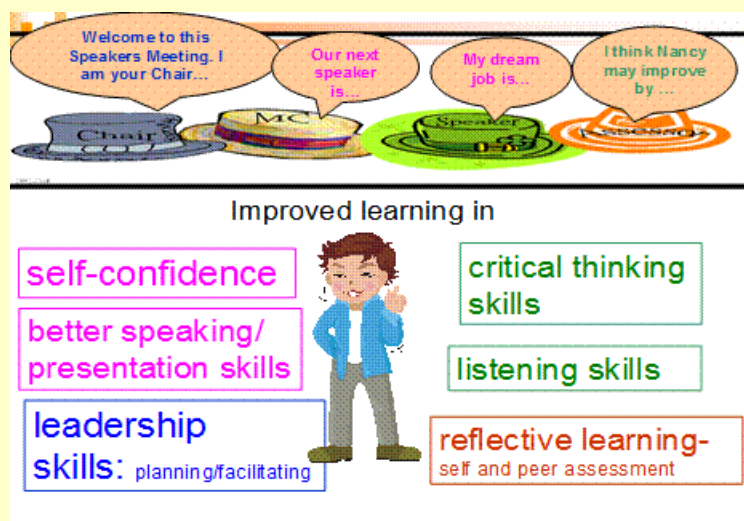
What did they learn in the Speakers Meetings? MCs said that they became more confident and improved their presentation skills. A Chair was proud of his role in hosting a meeting. He learned much about the topics. An assessor learned to listen for key information. In another group, the students felt that the Speakers Meeting helped them improve their language skills. Besides, two students could see the value of Speakers Meetings in their future secondary education.

**Evaluation - teachers**

The P6 teachers held an evaluation meeting towards the end of the year.



They found that this initiative can help improve students' confidence and speaking skills. The meetings also brought changes to students' attitude to learning. Even the less able students managed to speak before an audience.



On the whole, through playing different roles in the meetings, the students developed their presentation skills, and greater confidence in speaking. They also practised leadership skills, critical thinking skills, listening skills and

reflective learning through self and peer assessment; all these would be useful for them to plan for their learning.

## Implications

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The project proved to be effective to stimulate the interest, and enhance the confidence and motivation of P6 students to work beyond their current plateau of learning. The students, irrespective of their proficiency levels, managed to find their place on the platform of public speaking and make good changes in learning.

For Speakers Meetings to be set up and implemented effectively, teachers may take note of the following points:

- 1 Always bear in mind the meeting should facilitate learning in different domains of education, and call for students' active application of language and non language skills.
- 2 Use a flexible approach to plan for the implementation of Speakers Meetings. For example, for the more able classes, assign all meeting roles in the first meeting, and add unprepared speech parts in the second Speakers Meeting; for the less able classes, assign only speakers in the first meeting, and add MC, and Chair in the second meeting.
- 3 Provide sufficient knowledge of the new strategy (e.g. the meaning of public speaking, the advantages of being a good speaker, what people do in a Speakers Meeting), and skills (e.g. resources and materials such as demonstration video clips, technical know-how of script writing, assessment criteria and forms) and time (for practice, preparation for their own roles, and rehearsal).
- 4 Involve students for a negotiated agenda and planning. In the project, P6 students showed enthusiasm, creativity and capability to bring a light mood to the second meeting to cheer up the audience, e.g. visual aids and objects, interesting MC dialogues. So a good teaching strategy should be one that gives a free hand to students, particularly those at KS2, to join the teacher in the activity design and preparation.
- 5 Ask for quality, not quantity. Like process writing, students learn at different stages in the process leading to the output. In the process prior to a Speakers Meeting, students need time to learn, to practise and finally to perform. They also need to review and reflect on their performance. Thus Speakers Meetings should take place when all students are ready for their roles. They will then put up a good show. It does not matter if there are only 2 to 3 Speakers Meetings held in a year.

## Remarks

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Acknowledgements:

Mr. Chan Wing Pong  
Ms Angela Chu  
Ms Russ Lai  
Ms Joanne Lau  
Ms Olivia Lau  
Ms Judy Ng

S.K.H. Yan Laap Memorial Primary School