Welcome

This issue of *Straits Talking* is devoted to our reflections upon strategies designed to promote literacy skills. Literacy is, of course, a universal pedagogical issue and an area of extensive research. Over the last year, teachers at SIS have explored a diversity of language development strategies: activities to enable learners to use oracy as a tool for conceptual understanding; activities that will assist learners in their engagement with texts; activities that will develop students’ abilities to use varied, appropriate vocabulary and structure their writing.

In this issue you will find practical examples of strategies tried in lessons that can be adapted for use across the curriculum, through the full range of age and ability. Examples include: collaborative learning tasks in PE and Mandarin, activities designed to develop writing skills in French and Science; language development strategies in Malay.

In the Autumn term, the school will focus collectively and decisively upon writing skills. Our reflections will be published in the next issue. We hope that you enjoy this issue and discover some thought-provoking new ideas.

Andrew Crompton
Head of Secondary.

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Communicative Language Teaching in Malay as a Foreign Language

Language sets the identity of its users; teaching Malay as Foreign Language to second language learners is definitely a challenge. Despite that fact, the challenge can be tackled with several teaching language pedagogies. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is a technique utilised in language classes to emphasise interaction between teachers and students as the means and goals of study (Richards, 2006). This approach gives language learners the authority to acquire the competence to speak and write fluently and mould them into active learners.

As we look into the requirement of Malay as Foreign Language, the subject urges students to speak and write coherently in Malay. Therefore, we explore students’ daily routines and subject-related issues in Malay and we inspire and motivate our students to respond in Malay. This language approach is applied at all levels from Year 7 to Year 11. As we have diverse learners, this approach encourages students to be more interactive and participative as well as improving their language command.

Let’s Speak!

To heighten students’ confidence, we hold general classroom discussion once a week pertaining to social issues such as vandalism, discipline cases, depression and bullying. As teachers, we facilitate the discussion to generate logical and acceptable opinions – and we provide feedback that focuses positively on their engagement in discussion. This term, learners in Year Year 7 and Year 10 have participated actively in classroom discussion and have summarised their discussions in cogent and concise writing. Outstanding students who have spoken confidently and intellectually have been named as ‘Best Presenter of the Week’.
Critical Reading and Real World Applications

Reading paragraphs and short texts in Malay Language is often a challenge for students. Therefore, we use the critical reading tool to teach students to carefully identify and evaluate the text for information. Critical reading encourages students to analyse texts through higher level questioning techniques and it is a process of reading that goes beyond just merely understanding the text (Pavel, 2011). For example, this term during comprehension activities focusing on the vocabulary associated with a picnic, teachers have questioned students on activities that can be done during picnics, such as the dos and don’ts during a picnic and how a picnic may improve family relationships. Through this cognitive process, students eventually become active and avid readers and relate the subject to their real life experience. This method improves their language skills too.

Tony Buzan’s Mind Mapping

Mind maps are crucial and essential graphic tools for learning second and foreign languages. In Malay language lessons, brainstorming sessions and mind mapping enable our students to convey their ideas in a more efficient manner either in verbal presentation or essay writing (see: Salter, 2011).

Year 7 and Year 8 students enjoy working in groups and prefer ‘hands-on’ activities. They are recommended to discuss and generate ideas in their groups and present their outcomes in the form of mind maps to assist in higher level comprehension of concepts. This method is also helpful in boosting retention of information – students are more likely to remember facts learnt from graphic forms than the lengthy passages. It is an essential and highly effective tool for both teachers and students.

Reflection

Ultimately, we found the methods mentioned proved to be effective as students became more confident and proficient in communicating in the Malay language. The approaches and methods mentioned above can be applied in any language classes to make students’ totally engrossed and engaged in lessons. As for me, I look forward to begin compiling portfolios to showcase students’ accomplishments. Over time, teaching portfolios can help me to reflect the development of my role and also to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching pedagogies applied in language classrooms.

Useful links:


Ms. Sathiawathi Sinnathamby
BIG Writing in Year 4 French Lessons

Language is divided into four key skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Whereas reading and listening are considered passive skills, speaking and writing are active skills that usually inspire trepidation in young learners. As we are fortunate enough to have small classes in French here at Straits, so then is the audience, and therefore speaking is made a lot less daunting. Writing, however, is still an area in which students struggle to excel, bound by their own language limitations. Many students tend to write phonetically, where they lack an appreciation of where one word ends and another starts, as pointed out by research by Gretchen Ingram. Other students try to literally translate phrases from one language to another which usually ends up with poor syntax and unfortunate mistranslations - for instance, the English expression “I’m full” meaning to have eaten enough or too much, literally translates to “je suis pleine” in French, which contrarily means ‘I’m pregnant’!

Ros Wilson developed an approach to teaching writing, known as Big Writing, aimed primarily at younger students to raise attainment in literacy in English. Wilson identifies four key features that she believes are key to improving writing in the primary age range: vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation. The concept of ‘stealing’ or ‘borrowing’ from other students is encouraged when pupils see elements of writing that they like. Children are given longer amounts of time to write and develop their writing and editing skills.

With this in mind, I wanted to transfer some of these key ideas to French. My students may not have the range of vocabulary to write as freely in French as they do in English, however they have built up their own French VCOP on a smaller scale and can certainly ‘borrow’ ideas from model texts. Therefore, the main points that I took from Wilson’s Big Writing to use myself were:

- Giving students the time to write and edit;
- Ensuring that they have a bank of key words and phrases to use;
- Building a positive atmosphere that is conducive to creative writing;

Given that my secondary students have a more stringent curriculum and less time to spend on creative writing, I chose to use my year 4 class as my ‘guinea pigs’ to trial this approach.

We started by reading a simple French story, Les Quatre Amis, with many repetitions and cognates (words with similar roots, such as ‘le sport’ in French is ‘sport’ in English). When originally faced with such a long text, my students looked at me with puzzlement and fear. They never thought that they could read so much in French. This only magnified when I told them that I would hardly be helping them with vocabulary. We read the first section together and they highlighted all of the words they knew. They played ‘language detective’ to figure out the words that they didn’t already know. I then helped them with a few of the more difficult words and phrases. When we repeated this process with the successive three sections, they found that they knew more and more and needed me less and less, due to the repetitive style of the story. We then looked at all of the phrases that were repeated throughout the story and why they had been used so often. These were the phrases that they would then ‘borrow’ for their own story.

Upon announcing that they would be writing their own story, they fought their initial fears of self-doubt with the reminder that they had also at first distrusted their ability to read and understand the story, and yet managed to do so largely unaided.

Along with some independent dictionary work, the students constructed the plan for their story, changing the key concepts of Les Quatre Amis to make it their own. They then had a few lessons to actually write their story together. I played some relaxing piano music and let them work independently, only
answering a few key questions. After the first drafts were done, I typed these and compiled them into a booklet, with space for their illustrations and even their own blurbs about themselves, the authors, at the back.

The end product was a fluent and well-crafted narrative, with imagination and creativity. These learners showed their ability to use adjectives and agree them according to masculine, feminine and plural, use connectives and good openers.

“I think that the first time I saw the story, I thought it was so difficult and when we started reading, it got easier because we learned the words by figuring them out. When we actually started making our own story it was very fun. I thought it was going to be hard but it got easy because I read the other story and we did it similar. I would like to do this kind of activity again because it is very fun.”

Amira Year 4

As Keith Sharpe wrote, “reading and writing in MFL (modern foreign languages) provides opportunities to raise pupils’ language awareness which should be exploited, for example common roots with English words and phrases.” Year 4’s Big Writing was indeed an opportunity for them to find language patterns, expand their vocabulary and boost their confidence in the language.

I found that by giving students the independence, time and a goal to achieve, the students overcame their fear of writing and making mistakes. They worked collaboratively to create an amazing story, which is now available to read in the school library!

“First time, when I saw the story I thought it would be super hard but then when we started reading it, it became easier. I practised it a lot so now I can understand the story. When we started writing our own story I felt a bit nervous because I was so excited but also I thought it would be hard. At the end it was so simple because I had figured out the words. I am proud of myself for writing so much in French.”

Tamem Year 4

Ms. Harriet Glover

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Straits International School
Developing Communication and Team-Work skills in PE lessons

Energisers and Team Building games to improve group cohesiveness and inspire learning

Sitting in one place for any length of time or trying to learn something that is just not clicking can be frustrating for anyone let alone students in a classroom. The introduction of an activity to get students out of their seats and encourage different parts of the brain to work can help to help to reboot innovating thinking. The application of energisers and team building games to implement a new concept to the classroom can also help to invigorate and inspire students on many intellectual levels.¹²

The following are a few of my tried and tested energisers and team building activities that I have observed and refined throughout my years of teaching; these have helped to bond groups in both classrooms and in team games outside the classroom.

Helium Stick

Equipment: 1 Broom/Mop or stick without the head – 1.2m long

Instructions: Split into group of 6 or even groups, if possible. If you have multiple teams this can add to the excitement of a competition. Spare students can act as judges and be ready to rotate into teams after each trial. Teams will split in half and line up face each other. Students need to hold their pointer finger out level with their hips and level with all team members’ hands. Once they are ready, you will place the stick onto their fingers – if there is more than one team make sure this happens simultaneously for each team. Ensure teams do not hold onto the stick, they must only have the stick rest on their pointer fingers only. The team task is to work together to get the stick onto the ground! Watch the Helium stick rise! After each turn encourage students to discuss ideas and concepts about what they could do to improve as a team. Team work and communication will become a key concept in their success.³

Human Knot

Equipment: A group of at least 8 students

¹ www.cdc.com
² www.buzzle.com
³ www.leadership.com
**Instructions:** Students will form a circle and put their hands in the middle. They must join hands in the middle of the circle whilst ensuring that they are joined only with two different hands and it must not be someone next to them. Students will work together to ‘untie the HUMAN knot’. Team work, communication, leadership, problem solving and thinking outside the square will help to encourage success in this activity.  

**Running Tic Tac Toe**

**Equipment:** Use chalk, plastic lines or hoops to form lines or to make a 9 square tick/tac/toe. You will need 3 items that are the same or the same colour for team members to place on the TIC TAC TOE board.

**Instructions:** Split the group into two teams. The first 3 people in line from each team will need their tic tac toe pieces, ready to go.

Both teams will start around 7ms away. On ‘go’, one person from each team will run to the Tic Tac Toe board and place their team piece on the board. They will then run back to tag the next person in their team to run to place a piece on the board. Once all pieces have been used and if no team has made 3 in a row the next runner can move one and only one of their own team pieces in a free space on the board. This continues until one team has 3 in a row in any direction. In this activity, students get fit and improve agility with the short fast sprint; they will increase blood flow to the brain. The game also inspires team work, problem solving and thinking outside the square.  

**Spot the Difference**

**Equipment:** Just the clothes that students are wearing

**Instructions:** When working in pairs, one of the pair must look at their partner for 1 minute. The partner will then leave the room and make 5 changes to their appearance and then return the room. Their partner will then need to spot the difference.

If working in a team, each team member can leave the room and swap one thing each. The group will then return to the room for the other group to pinpoint the differences.

*Be sure to adapt your ideas and concepts using any of these successful games. These can also be applied to a multitude of work environments, organisations and encourage collaborative environments.*

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4 [www.education.com](http://www.education.com)

5 [www.youtube/tictactoe_game](http://www.youtube/tictactoe_game)

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Ms. Rowan Barrow
Developing Writing skills in IGCSE Science

Teaching IGCSE Science students to communicate their knowledge and understanding can be tricky. Sometimes, students score less than expected not because they are not knowledgeable, but because they do not know how to structure their answers in response to the demands of questions and mark-schemes.

Modelling by using mark scheme and exemplar answers is a tried-and-tested method for enabling students to understand how to communicate their understanding; it provides a standard or example for imitation or comparison. Modelling is effective for teaching students any academic or social skill, routine, or procedure that we want them to do in a specific way.

In IGCSE Science, I provided a set of questions for students to complete within a given time. Before the papers were collected, students were asked to self-estimate how many marks they would score for each question. After self-estimating the marks for each question, total estimated scores were calculated by students and stated on the front page of the paper. Students were often surprised by the eventual comparison between predicted and actual results. Subsequent discussion helped us to explore how to maximise marks; students said that their understanding progressed during my modelling method; they followed my explanations and demonstrations closely. In our discussions, I asked the students to observe the mistakes which had caused them not to score full marks. It could be a totally wrong answer, or missing important key words. From there I could see that the students were paying better attention to understand the mark scheme.

Later the process was repeated. After marking the next papers, most students scored higher than their estimated scores. Therefore I encouraged the students not to get discouraged whenever they feel that they did not do well in their assessment.

Therefore, I believe that through making and comparing self-estimating score with the actual score in modelling the mark scheme, students can:

- build greater self-confidence;
- know their strong and weak areas better in order to improve;
- learn important techniques in answering questions and IGCSE exam papers.

Mr. John Foo

Classroom displays in the primary setting

Many argue that classroom displays can be distracting, useless and time consuming. I therefore considered the primary settings that I have worked in and whether classroom displays had an impact on students and progress in the classroom and if so, was it positive?

It is arguable that the constant change of displays and bright colours are over-engaging. Having experienced working alongside students with various needs I have noticed students’ lack of focus and their tendency to become easily distracted due to over-engaging classroom displays. Andrew-Power and Gormley (2009:48) reported that when asking for feedback from students to the question “What makes a good learning environment?” they responded that they learned better in simple and tidy classrooms and one student responded saying that “chaotic classrooms equal chaotic lessons”. In contrast to this, creating vibrant displays sometimes engage and encourage students to explore what is shown on the displays. It therefore seems logical to model strategies and resources on these occasions.

Most schools consider regular changes of displays crucial in order to fit with a current topic. However, if the topic changes weekly or fortnightly, it can often be a challenge for teachers to create engaging and creative displays quickly. Is it really worthwhile...
changing these displays? Are students noticing and benefitting?

Considering this idea, below you can see a resource display for English conveying various vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation. 

Although it took time to model how best to use the display, it is clear that this is used as they demonstrate the language in their speaking and writing.

Key words across displays enable children to check spellings. This is especially beneficial for subjects such as English and Science where vocabulary changes regularly and can often be a challenge to learn or spell. As well as this, Working Walls demonstrate strategies for current topics. These offer students the opportunity to be resourceful and independent, using the vocabulary displayed when finding a topic tricky.

There are opportunities to create display boards that are interactive where children are able to physically move objects or explore through touching, reading or listening. Below, you can see an example of our current topic of ‘time’. Students can read the question and quiz themselves or a peer and then check the answer by lifting up the paper for the answer.

I asked students if they felt that the display was useful. These were some of their responses:

“I learn new words because they change for every topic”.

“They are different colours and I know that connectives are green”.

“If the classroom was grey and black, I don’t think I would look at the walls. I like looking at the walls in our classroom because I use the words and ideas in my writing”.

Often displays demonstrate evidence of learning and many argue that they are pointless as they do not
allow students to focus their learning. Disagreeing with this, I would argue that everyone wants to feel proud of their achievements and it gives them the “I can” feeling, especially among young students. Whole-class displays give students the sense of ownerships and affirms that everyone has equal value which engenders a feeling of value in all the children, regardless of their academic abilities, (Department for Education, 2009).

In conclusion, it seems fair to state that often displays take a vast amount of time to plan, prepare and create. It is therefore crucial that, having gone to this effort, that the displays created are relevant, beneficial and constructive for the cohort of learners in that classroom. There should be a balance between engaging, celebratory and resourceful displays so that the displays enable all students in the classroom the opportunity to gain from the display whether it is building confidence or aiding academic progress.

References

2009, Department for education

Ms. Harriet Spearman

Cooperative learning in Mandarin

This term, I explored the use of cooperative learning strategies with my year 10 class. Their task was to create a Powerpoint and a poster based on the culture of China. The cooperative learning process provides opportunities for students to exchange and present ideas as a preface to writing. During the process of searching information, analysing information, creating Powerpoints and posters, learners worked together to improve their understanding of the subject.

After these lessons, students explored the attractions and historical people of China. They then evaluated how these aspects represent Chinese culture and considered how to present them. They decided that using multimedia is the best way,
concluding that Chinese people will need to combine technology to carry forward the spirit of China to the world and our next generation.

The best way to learn is to teach others. Partnering Mandarin learners with strong Mandarin speakers benefits both. It may be particularly beneficial to pair Mandarin learners with bilingual students. My next pedagogical trial was with my Key Stage classes, where I investigated the composition within groups of Mandarin first language students with Mandarin second language students, intending that the strong Mandarin speakers would assist their peers in group reading or group activities. The first language speakers also become ‘dictionaries’ to assist in writing vocabulary.

After one term of practising, the test results and the exam result showed that most of my Key Stage 3 Mandarin learners have improved. I am delighted with their progress.

Strategies for accessing information in the Primary classroom

Cold Learning

The most effective practice I’ve recently used is the implementation of an assessment for learning tool called ‘Cold Tasks and Hot Tasks’.

A Cold Task is an exercise at the beginning of every unit, or genre in literacy. The children have a go at doing the task – for example, if they’re doing poems they have a go at writing a poem without having it modelled for them.

I have the students read out their work in class, giving them each the opportunity to affirm what features of each other’s writing they appreciated. From this class exercise, we create a checklist that the students copy into their books.

They then complete the unit of work, building upon each feature as I teach them how to improve their work. At the end of the unit they do a Hot Task, which is a second go at doing the same piece of work.

In a pedagogical culture where modelling exemplars is seen as paramount, such an activity might seem counter-intuitive, but what this form of literacy work does is it allows me to be able to build on what the child already knows. Instead of just teaching them all the same thing, I can see if a child can already do some of the task, and can focus their learning accordingly. Modelling will still be used as a strategy – but this will be differentiated according to the needs of learners.

Ms Pang Sook Yee.
There are great benefits for the child, because they’re really able to see the difference between what they could do before and afterwards.

At the end of the unit, each child collates their best work into one presentable piece. This final work is used for their class project and becomes a part of the wall of excellence outside the classroom.

**Note taking**

A second strategy that I’ve implemented in my lessons, namely Humanities and PSHE - which require explanations, definitions of words and a movement to complex ideas - is note taking.

When using this strategy, I have found that the students learn to structure their written work in a more organised way, retain the information for easier retrieval, and take a more mature approach to learning the subject.

I then allow the students to share their notes with the slower writers, who in turn are given the opportunity to grasp the concepts at the same speed as the rest of the class.

**Language exploration**

With the aim or helping children to learn the same information and skills, laddering language in the classroom is extremely important. However, as a teacher with a better command of the English language, and the technical nature of some subject content, it is not always possible or easy. Therefore, to allow younger learners to access and use academic language effectively, I begin explaining difficult concepts, such as global citizenship, without adapting my language.

I do this to encourage active participation in the lesson and get the students to begin the process of asking questions. I allow lead the students towards different deciphering strategies, like breaking the term down into parts, comparing it to similar words, reading in context, syllabically breaking into manageable parts, and all the while, asking questions to steer them in the right direction, before finally using what they have supplied to build a mind map on the board of the topic areas that we will be discussing to demonstrate the meaning of the term.

Mr Richard Power.

**Using memory strategies for assessment literacy in History**

The acquisition of knowledge is, unsurprisingly, a primary objective for students studying history; students must be able to accurately recall, select and deploy relevant historical knowledge to support a coherent and logical argument, in order to achieve the highest grade at IGCSE level. Thus, by the time students taking IGCSE History sit their final examinations in the summer, they will be required to retrieve information studied more than twenty months previously.

In the first few lessons of teaching the start of the IGCSE course to students in year 10, it became clear in review sessions that they were finding it difficult to recall specific information from as recent as the week before. I was keen therefore, to implement strategies that would help them to build their long-term memory.

After all, acquisition of knowledge is the foundation of the subject and vital if students are to develop higher order critical thinking skills.

In his blog, ‘Memory Platforms’, Andy Tharby discusses the benefits of developing memory by having to regularly retrieve information from it. A significant point that he makes is that, “…the retrieval alters the memory system, the more you retrieve the more
accessible it is”. Another salient point that he makes is that the harder it is to retrieve information, the more embedded it becomes.

With this in mind, it made sense for me to introduce strategies to improve students’ memories that would be a component of lessons on a regular basis. Tharby suggests various strategies that could be implemented to achieve this. I decided to introduce a weekly ‘quiz’ and followed a structure suggested by Tharby, as follows:

**Questions:**
- Qs 1 & 2 – questions based on learning from last lesson
- Q3 – question based on learning from the previous week
- Q4 – question based on learning from 3-4 weeks ago
- Q5 – question based on learning from the beginning of the term

The questions were deliberately restricted to the retrieval of specific facts, such as names of people, countries, events etc. that students would potentially need to include in writing accurate historical accounts in exams; thus the quiz was designed to be a quick review, completed independently by each student. Once the quiz was completed, I would mark their answers almost immediately, as they completed a new task - in this way they got instant feedback and I was able to gauge where the gaps in the knowledge were. In order to ‘close the gap’, students were then required to find out the answers to any questions they got wrong as part of their weekly homework. In this way, it didn’t matter so much how many questions they got wrong as the outcome was the same: they were required to retrieve the relevant information.

Another strategy I have recently implemented in my lessons is ‘history bingo’. Again, to play the game students are required to retrieve information based on knowledge they have acquired over several weeks. The stakes are higher than for the low-stakes quiz, as it includes a degree of competition, but this has added an element of ‘fun’; indeed, students have now been requesting to play ‘history bingo’ and as part of their last homework, they have been given the task of designing their own bingo questions and cards for us to play in future lessons. I shall be monitoring the impact of this strategy over the next term.

Students in Year 10 have now had regular quizzes for the past few weeks and already I can report on several positive outcomes as follows:

- a) They allow me to assess quickly what they do and do not know and therefore what they need more practice in;
- b) The repetition of questions over several quizzes has led to eventual success for students at retrieval;
- c) Student confidence has been boosted as scores have gradually improved.

In the long-term it is hoped that implementation of such a simple strategy will help students to confidently tackle even the most challenging of examination questions.

Ms Jan Crompton.
Target-setting in the Primary classroom

Setting targets in the classroom is not a new concept. As teachers we do it daily through our lesson objectives (WALTS), our behaviour expectations, through marking, and through report writing - to name but a few.

However, in class 1W we felt we needed to make targets more individualised and explicit for the students. We wanted to set targets in a way that would be meaningful for them. Our focus was to help the underachieving children to close ‘gaps’ of underachievement and to ensure that all the students were working to their full potential. We felt that through target sharing with the children, we would be able to motivate them more towards achieving in class.

Before launching into target setting, we referred to some online resources for advice on establishing an effective target setting practice in the primary classroom. We noted the following:

Target setting in the classroom can:

- focus the teacher’s attention and effort on clearly defined priorities for children’s learning and progress;
- help children to have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve their work and achieve high personal standards;
- help parents know what they can do to support their children’s learning;
- enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies.

(weblni.org/downloads/44/44_20_Target%2520Setting%2520in%2520the%2520Primary%2520Classroom.doc+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk)

After this we decided to employ a ‘SMART’ approach to our target setting.

S = Specific
M = Measurable
A = Attainable
R = Relevant, Rigorous, Realistic, and Results Focused
T = Timely and Trackable

When looking for examples of SMART targets we referred to the websites cited below for examples. Using some of the suggestions and examples provided, we returned to the class to brainstorm with the children some SMART targets that they could set for themselves.

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/smart-goal-setting-with-students-maurice-elias
http://topachievement.com/smart.html

Our next task was to get the students excited about setting and accomplishing their goals. For this we got the help of some aliens! We decided to draw inspiration from the storybook Aliens love underpants as this book is a much loved story in our class. For this part, each child was given a selection of aliens to choose from. They were also given the task of designing some underpants for their alien and they were informed that their alien would wear a t-shirt with their target visibly displayed. The children were very excited being able to ‘adopt an alien’ and about designing underpants for their new alien friends. For deciding on targets, we sat individually with each child and through prompts and discussion we elicited a SMART target for each child. These targets were recorded on the alien’s t-shirt and we agreed a time to review. Each child’s alien was then displayed across our classroom on a washing line.

The final part of our goal setting which is very important, especially for children, is the celebration!

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For our class the reward comes in the form of being able to change the target t-shirt and underpants of their aliens! The children were very enthused about doing this. They love the idea of being alien fashion designers.

Currently, we are referring to the targets on a daily basis. Not only are the students aware of their own targets but also of each other’s and the support and positive dialogue exchanged between the children is priceless. Our children are determined to achieve their goals and our teaching has also become more concise as we are tailoring questions and feedback for the children so that their goals can be achieved.

Finally, we must note that while SMART goals are wonderful for something a student wants to accomplish in the short term, the biggest and most worthy goals in life may not always seem realistic or attainable. We do like to remind the children and ourselves of the wise words of the famous educator and visionary Kurt Hanh- ‘There is more in you than you think’.

Ms Karen Willoughby.

Developing understanding through kinesthetic learning and collaboration in Science

Science is full of discoveries and experiments. Science occurs at any time of the day in our daily lives. Learning and understanding the basic concepts can enable students to further incorporate the ideas and apply it in creating something novel.

It is important for students to have exposure to hands-on experiments. Some scientific concepts may be rather difficult for the students to understand and visualise. Therefore, carrying out experiments can be beneficial in a way that the students can better comprehend how a certain occurrence can be explained. Besides that, they can understand how certain factors can affect the experiment and find an explanation to it. The discussion that accompanies our investigations helps students to deepen understanding. Subsequent writing activities are enriched by the collaborative investigations.

My students learned about electrical circuits and had the opportunity to make their own switches out of polystyrene foam, cardboard, thumbtacks and metal paper clips. This enabled them to appreciate the purpose of a switch. They can then replace the metal paper clip (which works as an electrical conductor) with other items such as a nail, eraser, string, etc. This eventually helped to link the topic on electrical circuits to materials that are electric conductors or insulators.

In Year 5, the students conducted experiments to see what factors can speed up evaporation. They set-up the experiments and recorded the results themselves. The students learned to measure accurately; their collection of data as evidence confirmed their hypothesis which subsequently helped them to explain the process of evaporation. They also made their own periscopes and experienced how light can be reflected by using several mirrors to see an image.

Ms Nellie Wong.
In the next issue of Straits Talking:

Issue 3 of Straits Talking will be available in October and will be report upon our continuing Action Research into strategies promoting literacy skills, with a particular focus upon tips, techniques and essential principles for promoting writing skills. Our Autumn Term CPD will begin with whole-school training as a preface to further discussion, planning and classroom investigation in cross-curricular coaching groups. We look forward to sharing our new knowledge and deeper understanding!