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Thinking About
Reading and
Writing

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
(SINGAPORE)



Thinking About Reading and Writing



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Editorial

Our theme for this issue might well have been thinking about thinking, reading and writing. All the three literacy skills are inextricably bundled together no matter what languages or subjects we may want our pupils to learn. Writing is thinking – it is. Writing is the written representation of the thoughts of the writer regarding a certain topic or subject. Reading well, as opposed to simply reading, is also about critical thinking – do most learners fully comprehend and reflect on what they have read?

The importance of the reading teacher as a role model in fostering a reading culture through book discussions in school is shared by the teachers of Concord Primary, while Dr Lynn Ang discusses the teaching of reading and writing in the kindergarten curriculum. There is also an increasing need to discuss the media and media literacy, and to this end, we have included a write-up by Klea Scharberg on 'Writing and editing for the web' as well as a piece by Joy Lee who discusses the 'value adds' in the use of IT and online discussions to teach reading and writing.

We hope that this collection of articles will help educators reflect a little more deeply on what they have been doing in the classrooms to help their young learners even as they think about their own writing and about what they themselves have read.

The theme for the next issue is 'Educating the Whole Child'. We encourage you to think about this theme and then to start writing your article to share your ideas with our readership.

Happy writing and keep those articles coming in!

Soo Kim Bee



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Bridging Reading and Writing: A Cognitive Equation of Literacy

Dr Noel Chia Kok Hwee

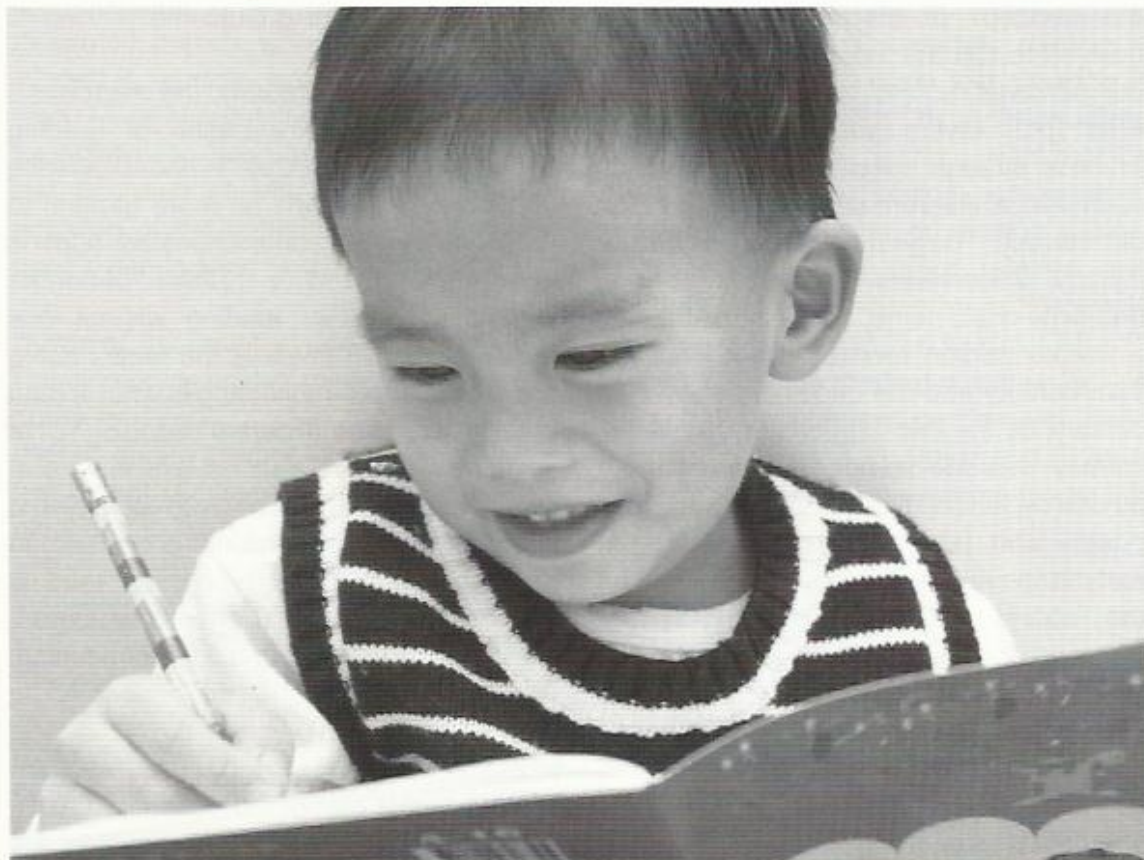
What is literacy?

Literacy development has always been the focus of our schooling here. The academic success of a student depends heavily on his/her competence and performance in literacy. In fact, early literacy achievement has been found to be a reliable prediction of later school success (Boyer, 1995). So important is learning to read and write, children poor in literacy need to be identified early in Primary 1 so that they can get appropriate help through the Learning Support Programme offered by the school.

What exactly is literacy? Goodman (1986) has argued that literacy in its entirety should be viewed from the pre-school literacy stage through the beginning literacy

stage, which refers to the beginning of a concerted school programme to support growth into literacy, to the progressive stage of higher literacy development. Hence, the concept of literacy is extended to include adult literacy (Downing & Leong, 1982), besides the literacy development and functioning of young and older children (Chia & Ng, 2000; Ollila & Mayfield, 1992).

The most fundamental concept of literacy is to be able to read and write (Saksena, 1970). Chia (1991, 1994) describes literacy as a synergy of reading and writing connected by a third cognitive process called fantasizing, which Donelson and Nilson (1980) describe as the active role played by a reader/writer in creating the literary work and also involving the



evocation of the "lived through" experience of the reader/writer during the transaction with the text. According to Rosenblatt (1986), the "lived through" experience evolves through attention on the part of the reader/writer to the personal meaning of the text. Fantasizing often plays an important role in allowing the reader/writer to enter the meta-world of the text, thereby making the stories "come to life" for the reader/writer (Long, Winograd & Bridge, 1989; Sadoski, Goetz & Kangiser, 1988).

However, literacy is more than just reading and writing put together on the different sides of the same coin joined by fantasizing. Braunger and Lewis (2001) describe it as a complex, developmental process that "allows us to make connections between our own and others' experiences; to inquire systematically into important matters; and to access, analyze, and evaluate information and arguments" (p.2). In short, literacy is the key to academic success and beyond for effective participation in the workforce, the community, and the body politic.

According to Braunger and Lewis (2001), the concept of literacy "has steadily evolved to suit the increasing demands of our personal, social, economic, and civic lives" (p.3). Myers (1996) has traced this process through specific literacy periods, each with a different operational definition of literacy. Beginning with signature literacy, which refers to the ability to read and write one's name, this was the mark of a literate person towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning early 19th century. By the mid-19th century, recitation literacy was the standard, demonstrated by oral recitation of memorized texts (e.g., poems and Bible verses). Then in the early 20th century, literacy was defined as the ability to read and understand previously unseen text and also the ability to spell correctly and write fluently as required for productive employment and citizenship. Myers (1996) has termed this as decoding/analytic literacy. As the population becomes more educated,

people begin to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of written language they encounter in their reading. This brings us to the higher appreciative literacy.

A Cognitive Equation of Literacy

Reading and writing are uniquely human and most complex of all cognitive activities. For both reading and writing to become successful, they require many basic processes that I have conveniently summarized into two equations: one for the reading process and the other, writing.

Equation 1:

$$RP = S \{B [T (D + Cp) + M] + P\} = RO$$

where RP is Reading Process

S is Setting (where the reading task takes place)

B is the Background Knowledge and Prior Experience of the Reader

T is Thinking

D is Decoding

Cp is Comprehension

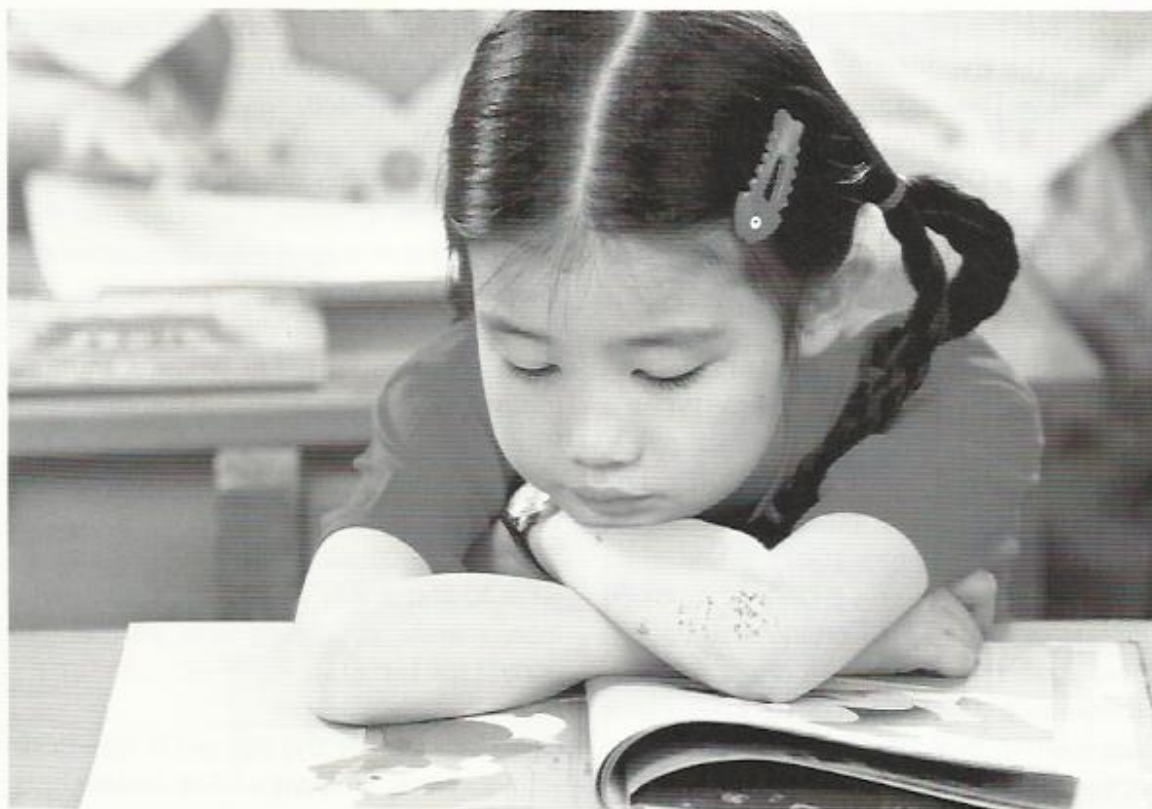
M is Motivation

P is Purpose.

RO is Reading Outcome

According to Chia (2004), the most basic part of the entire equation of reading process is $T (D + Cp)$. Without thinking (T), decoding (D) will be mere barking at print; without T, comprehension (Cp) is meaningless and a reader becomes hyperlexic, that is, reading without real understanding. T involves the reader doing some form of self-monitoring of what is read in order to ensure accurate decoding (Chia & Ching, 1999). T also establishes meta-comprehension (i.e., the ability to comprehend about one's own understanding of a text) to make sense of what has been read is correctly understood (Paris & Winograd, 1990). To quote Jacobs (1971): no meaning, no reading.

Motivation (M) is also a very important addend in this part of the equation: $T (D + Cp) + M$. It must come from within the



reader, beginning with the real interest to read (i.e., intrinsic motivator) (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). A child can be bribed to read (i.e., an extrinsic motivator is involved), but reading as such will not last long because it is not done with intrinsic interest (Kohn, 1993). On the other hand, a successful reader is an intrinsically motivated person who shows an explicit interest in reading, wants to read, and will read. More importantly, the reader with an expectation to learn from reading a given text also does so with a purpose (P). The equation of the reading process has now been extended into $[T (D + Cp) + M] + P$.

However, the equation does not stop there. Reading process also involves the reader's ability in recognizing the depicted facts or events during his/her encounter with the text (Buehl, 2001), connecting them to each other and to his/her background knowledge and prior experience (represented by B in the equation) as a means for interpreting and understanding the text (Schank & Abelson, 1977), and to memorize the information so that they can be used later (Latham & Sloan, 1987). The equation has been further extended into $B [T (D + Cp) + M] + P$.

In addition, reading process should be viewed within a given setting (represented by S in the equation) such as in a classroom or at home, which may or may not provide support and can influence the reader's mood, affecting his/her perspective and the way a given text is interpreted and understood (Braunger & Lewis, 2001; Morrow, 1990). For instance, reading a passage given in a class test situation is certainly a different experience from reading a storybook during a silent reading period. The former setting can result in some form of tension or reading anxiety while the latter is more relaxed and leisurely. We have now covered the whole equation of $RP = S \{B [T (D + Cp) + M] + P\}$ and whatever the reading outcome (RO) is going to be will depend on how well these factors (i.e., S, B, T, D, Cp, M and P) have been developed to play their respective parts.

Equation 2:

$$WP = S \{B [T (E + Co) + M] + P\} = WO$$

where WP is Writing Process

S is Setting (where the writing task takes place)

B is the Background Knowledge and
Prior Experience of the Writer
T is Thinking
E is Encoding
Co is Composition
M is Motivation
P is Purpose
WO is Writing Outcome

T (E + Co) forms the most fundamental part of the equation of writing process. When a child writes, two sub-processes take place. First, the child needs to encode (E), i.e., transforming an idea into words. Second, he/she will compose (Co) a text, i.e., arranging ideas to form a clear and unified impression in order to create an effective message (Harris & Hodges, 1995). However, for E and Co to take place successfully, thinking (T) has to come into picture. With E, T plays an important role in transcription and spelling as well as self-editing along the way. On the other hand, when T interacts with Co, ideas freely flow into the writer's mind as he/she starts sub-creating various scenes of his/her own imaginary world. The product of T and Co results in much fantasizing (or imagination) of events supposedly taking place in that meta-world, followed by organizing of thoughts/ideas to formulate a plot for the story (Chia, 1991; Lewis, 1975). At a higher level, T in the writing process is a skill that students take with them beyond the classroom. In today's job market, written communication skills are extremely important for success (Knipper & Duggan, 2006).

For writing to happen naturally, there must be that compelling force of motivation (M) that comes from an urge or itch within the writer to want to write (Singh, 1981). Whether he/she is writing for an audience, for him/herself or to have the work published is secondary. The late Professor C.S. Lewis (creator of the *Chronicles of Narnia*) was reportedly said to write *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to please the child within him (Sayer, 2005; Wellman, 1997). In other words, the purpose (P) of writing, in this instance, is for a writer writes

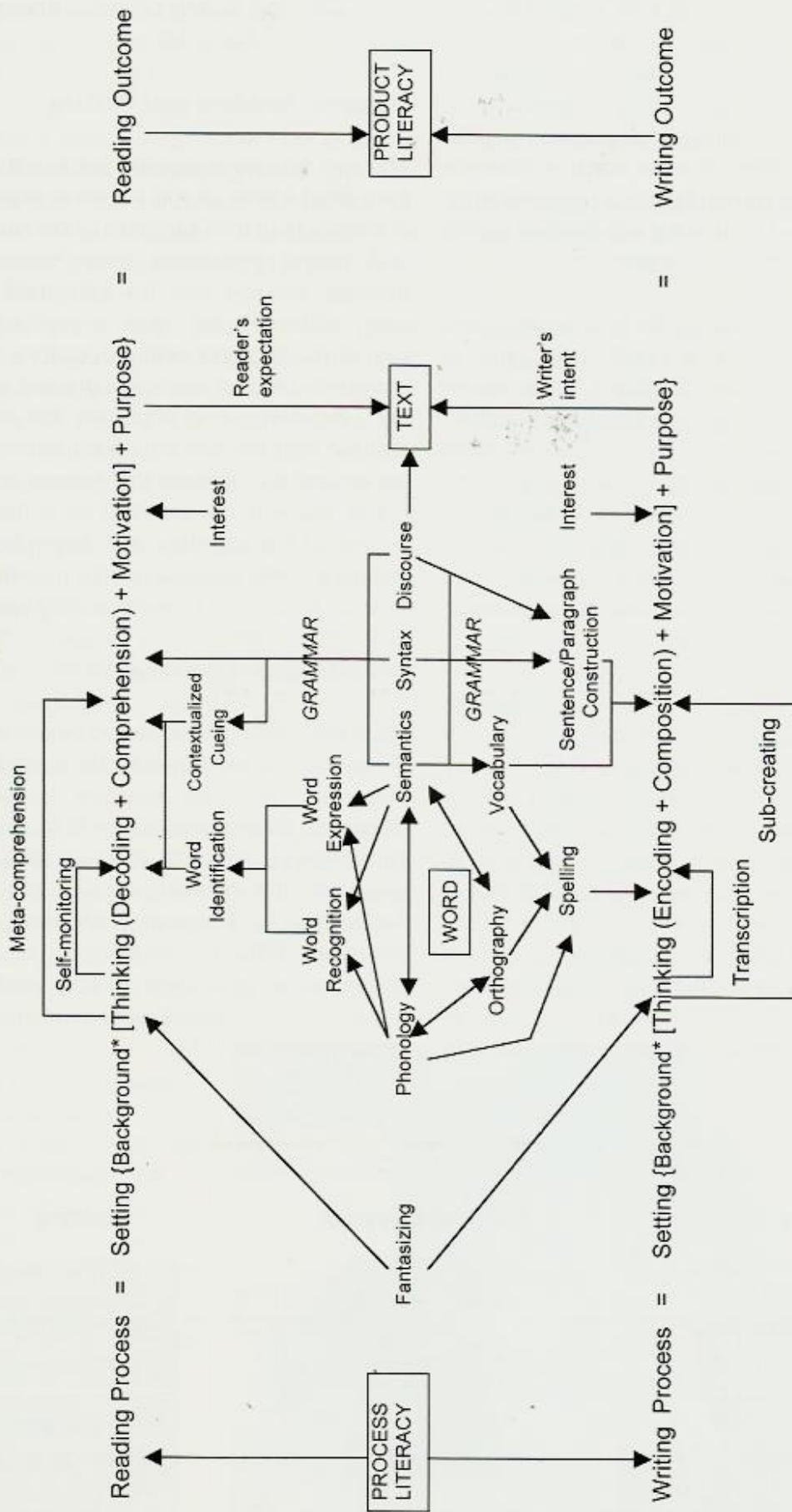
to satisfy that urge or itch within and also to obtain self-satisfaction when the piece of writing is completed.

In a classroom situation, P plays a thoroughly different role. Children write because they have to write to submit their compositions to their teacher for grading. Hence, we can see that there are two different P's. The first P is the result of a writer's intrinsic motivation to write or to quote from Professor Kirpal Singh's words: "... an itch we feel inside ourselves. And until we scratch it the itch gives us a lot of trouble. However, because the itch is inside us we have to find a way of getting rid of it other than merely scratching any part of our body" (1981, p.8).

Unlike the first P, the second P has to do with external influence. For instance, a child cannot refuse to write a composition that is required to complete the English class test, and hence, to write is to fulfill the purpose of completing and passing the test. However, the second P goes beyond that. It concerns with two practical issues: learning to write and writing to learn. Students need to learn to write throughout their lives (Fisher & Frey, 2004). From primary school, they learn to encode words, spell, construct sentences, figure out the mechanics of paragraphs, and develop understandings of grammar (Knipper & Duggan, 2006). As they move on to higher levels, students refine and expand these skills. Instruction now focuses on the process of writing, i.e. pre-writing, writing, reviewing, revising, editing, and final drafting, before coming to a finished product.

On the other hand, writing to learn, according to Knipper and Duggan (2006), "differs from learning to write because the writing produced is not a process piece that will undergo multiple changes resulting in a published document. Instead, the purpose for writing to learn is meant to be a catalyst for further learning and meaning making" (p.462). The purpose for writing to learn becomes an opportunity for students to

Diagram 1: A Cognitive Equation of Literacy



Background* is the shortened from "Background Knowledge and Experience"

recall, clarify, and question what they know about a subject and what they still wonder about with regard to that subject matter. Students also discover what they know about their content focus, their language, themselves, and their ability to communicate all of that to a variety of audiences (Knipper & Duggan, 2006). In other words, a student's background knowledge and prior experience (represented by B in the equation) in writing to learn is called into attention.

B is always essential for both reading and writing. Without it, a reader only barks at print without any slightest idea where he/she is heading and a writer just scribbles and scribbles without any sense of what he/she is producing. B brings into the writing process whatever a writer knows about a given subject and that can be based on what he/she has previously read or learnt as well as his/her experience relevant to the subject.

Finally, the setting (S) also plays an important part in the complete equation of writing process. S can refer to any environment in which the writing activity takes place. It can be in a classroom or outside it (e.g., in a park or library) or at home. S also includes any support that is given to the writer and such support can be tangible (e.g., a dictionary to check spelling) or intangible (e.g., praise from the teacher). Whatever the writing outcome (WO) is depends on how successfully the

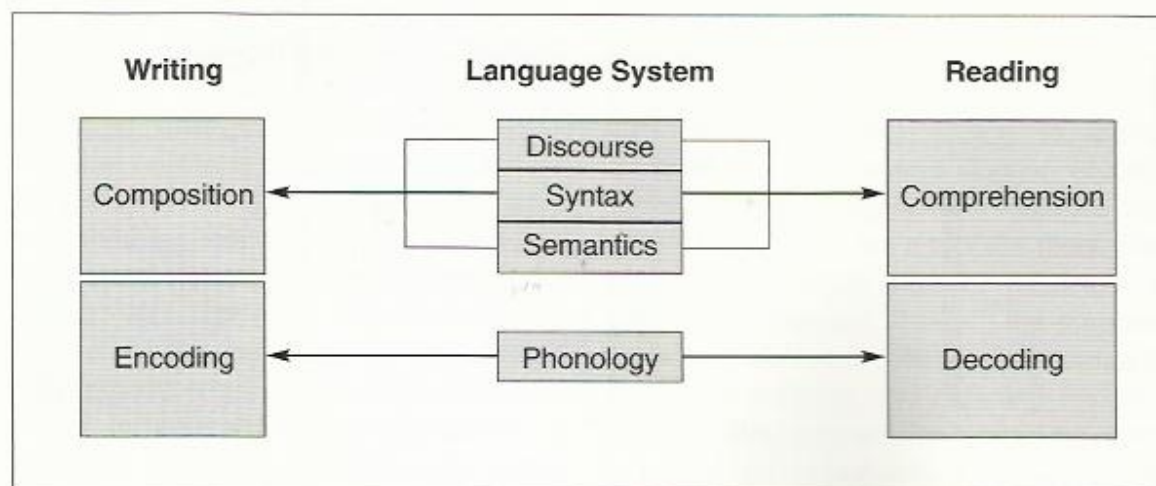
interplay of the various writing factors (i.e., S, B, T, E, Co, M and P) take place within the equation of writing process, where $WP = S \{B [T (E + Co) + M] + P\}$.

Bridging Reading and Writing

The two equations can be put together to form what I term as the cognitive equation of literacy (see the Diagram 1): how reading and writing processes (also known as *process literacy*) can be integrated and each influences the other to produce the kind of reading and writing outcomes (also known as *product literacy*) expected at the end. However, it is important for me to mention that the two equations formulated earlier and the diagram that follows should not in any way be regarded as a realistic picture of literacy they are attempting to represent. My purpose is to provide an analogy to explain how integrating reading and writing can build a bridge to better understanding of literacy at work.

Integrating writing with reading or vice versa enhances comprehension (Brandenburg, 2002) because the two are reciprocal processes. Writing engages students, extends their thinking, deepens understanding, and energizes the meaning-making process. According to Fordham, Wellman and Sandman (2002), "considering a topic under study and then writing about it requires deeper processing than reading alone entails" (p.151).

Diagram 2



Looking at the Diagram 1 again, we can see that decoding (D) and encoding (E) require the knowledge of phonology, orthography and semantics put together. Hence, for a child to be able to decode a word (e.g., "cat" as in "The cat chases a mouse"), he/she must know how to sound (phonological knowledge) it out by recognizing the constituent letters (i.e., c, a, and t) (orthographic knowledge) that make up the word. Next, the child must know the meaning (semantic knowledge) of the word "cat" used in the given sentence and that it differs from the "cat" in "Do not let the cat out of its bag." In the same way, for encoding a word, the child must know how a word sounds (phonological knowledge), transcribe the sounds into their corresponding letters (orthographic knowledge), and know its meaning (semantic knowledge) to use it correctly in writing.

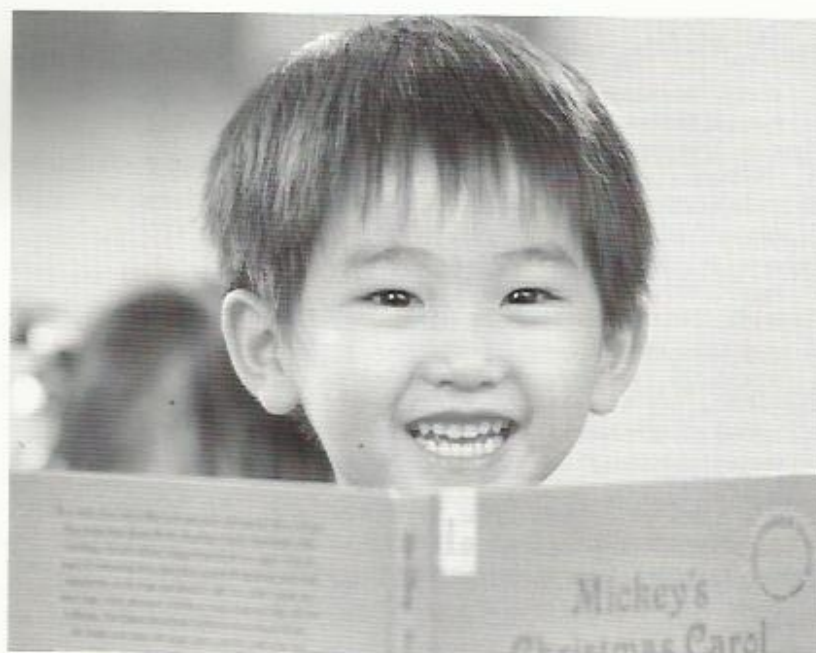
On the other hand, comprehension (Cp) and composition (Co) in literacy depend on one's exposure to the various text types or genres, which can be classified under literary and non-literary, and also being influenced by the medium types: visual and auditory (Stern, 2003). For example, a text in a visual genre may be literary (a novel) or non-literary (a classified advertisement). Similarly, a text in a literary genre may be visual (a cartoon strip) or auditory (a radio play). Semantics, syntax and discourse which form the higher abilities in the language system (see Diagram 2) play an important role in establishing comprehension in the reading process and in producing composition in the writing process (Shaywitz, 2003).

Implications for Teachers

This article has highlighted several impor-

tant points for teachers of literacy and language education:


1. In decoding and encoding of words, students must establish a strong foundation in phonological, orthographic and semantic knowledge.
2. Being able to read and write requires a student to think through the process.
3. A rich background knowledge and experience is essential for helping a student to comprehend what he is reading as well as providing him/her ideas when writing a composition.
4. Whether a student is reading or writing, he/she must have a purpose in doing so. This may come from within the student, who enjoys doing what he/she is doing (intrinsic motivation), or external demands such as a written test to be completed for grading (extrinsic motivation).
5. To be able to read fluently and accurately with understanding or to be able to write prolifically, students must build a strong language system comprising of semantics, syntax and discourse.
6. Finally, whatever the reading or writing outcome might be depends on the



reading or writing process that a student has gone through. That is, the quality of the product literacy tells us much about the kind of input (literacy and language education) that the students have gone through in their process literacy.

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The Kindergarten Curriculum and the Teaching of Reading and Writing


Dr Lynn Ang Ling-Yin



The theme of this issue, 'Thinking about Reading and Writing', is particularly appropriate in light of current government initiatives to move towards an approach to education and pedagogy that is more diverse, creative and experimental. The subject of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's inaugural National Day speech in 2004, 'Teach Less, Learn More' (TLLM), is in part a precipitation for this call for a more innovative education provision, in order to encourage students to strive, not just for academic excellence, but to do so in an innovative and creative way. It is a strong statement of the need to develop the 'whole child', to promote a culture of lifelong learning, and to encourage a thirst for education beyond the classroom and school environment. This vision of education, of teaching and learning, was further encapsulated in the national framework, 'Strategies for Effective

Engagement and Development (SEED), introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2005, to support the government's vision of using more interactive and experiential teaching to engage with students, in a bid to enhance 'teaching programmes, pedagogy and assessment approaches' (MOE Press Release, 2005).

Within this context, the teaching of reading and writing in the Early Years, is about looking beyond the mere delivery of standardised lesson plans and assessments. It is about providing a curriculum for pre-school children that is flexible, creative, and enjoyable, and one which emphasises more than just the conventions of literacy. The ideal student, as Gopinathan describes, should more than just excel in the basic skills of reading and writing. The model student, in twenty-first century Singapore, should be able to



'collate, synthesise, analyse and apply knowledge to solve problems; capable of being creative and innovative; not risk-averse; be able to work independently and in groups; and be a lifelong learner' (Gopinathan 2001, p.11). For educators, what this means is a challenge to explore more innovative teaching approaches in the classroom. In the voice of the teacher Pearly Chai, in her article on 'Teach Less, Learn More' published in the 2005 issue of REVIEW, she writes, '[t]he teacher must be creative, dare to be different and dare to try out ideas, bearing in mind the needs of the students' (Chai, 2005). This drive towards creative and innovative teaching, I argue, should be the cornerstone of every curriculum and the mantra of every teacher, especially those working in pre-schools.

The new pre-school curriculum

In 2003, a national curriculum for all pre-schools entitled *A Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore* was launched by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2003). With this, a significant milestone in Early Years education was reached, as for the very first time in the country, it reflected the beginning of a government endorsed curriculum for pre-school children aged 3 to 6. The introduction of the new curriculum was a formal recognition of the importance of the Early Years as a distinct stage of education in its own right, and an official statement of what a 'quality pre-school education in Singapore' should entail (*A Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore*, p.6).

The *Framework* provides a reference for practitioners to draw upon and plan their curriculum, and is structured around six areas of learning: aesthetics and creative expression, environmental awareness, motor skills development, numeracy, self and social awareness, and language and literacy. It is accompanied by a compilation of six booklets, with each booklet focusing on a specific area of learning. Alongside this, there are also two DVDs on 'Nurturing

Early Learners' and an additional booklet on *Putting Principles into Practice* which offers guidance for educators in planning the curriculum, developing the learning environment, and monitoring children's development.

In the section on language and literacy, the *Framework* offers a guide to practitioners in helping children develop their reading and writing skills, with a list of recommended resources and suggested activities for educators to use in their daily practice. It emphasises the importance of language and literacy as 'crucial to young children's learning', and the role of the adult in facilitating this development. It states explicitly the task of the educator in enhancing children's language development, and to cultivate in children a 'positive disposition for language learning', through:

- valuing children's talk by taking time to listen and respond
- simulating verbal interactions between children
- immersing them in a literacy rich environment
- encouraging their efforts to use language to record their ideas and thoughts

('Language and Literacy Development', 2003, p.4)

The four tasks above are defined in the 'Language and Literacy Development' guide as fundamental to the role of the educator. To achieve these tasks, practitioners are provided with a list of 'examples of what children can do' and a set of general learning goals for children such as 'listen attentively and respond appropriately', 'enjoy books, stories and rhymes', 'develop phonological awareness' and 'communicate meanings in writing'. They range from broad and generic goals such as 'display appropriate reading behaviour' to more specific ones such as 'discriminate between different letter sounds'. The learning goals specify the

competences and experiences that children are to acquire in the area of language development at pre-school stage. Guided by these goals and principles, the *Framework* has therefore clear aspirations for children and educators. It offers general advice to educators in helping children achieve their goals, by asserting that the educator needs to 'provide opportunities in both informal and formal settings for children to develop their command of spoken English ...' ('Language and Literacy Development', 2003, p.11) and that the 'teacher needs to be a clear and exciting communicator, and careful and thoughtful listener' ('Language and Literacy Development', 2003, p.4).

The *Framework* is therefore centred on a series of tasks, activities and goals in helping children develop their literacy skills. It is prescriptive in stipulating the types and level of reading and writing skills that children at pre-school stage need to develop, and is didactic in its approach to literacy development, emphasising that children 'need to know ...', and 'children also need to ...' ('Language and Literacy Development', 2003, p.34). However, as prescriptive and structured as the *Framework* purports to be, in reality, the implementation of the curriculum is subject to the autonomy of the educator. While the *Framework* stresses the importance of introducing children to reading and writing through multiple ways of learning, in practice, how this is implemented depends essentially on the educator's interpretation and application of the curriculum. The challenge for educators then, is to work out for their settings a curriculum that takes into consideration the importance of innovative learning, and one which focuses on the competencies and potential of the child.

Challenges ahead

With the introduction of the *Framework*, pre-school teachers and educators must now transform principles into practice. They need to be encouraged and empowered as interpreters and innovators of the new

curriculum, not just as mere implementers of a prescribed document. Beyond the confines of the *Framework*, teachers must be willing to create conditions for discovery and experimentation in the classroom, leaving the children to enjoy their experiences with reading and writing, while engaging them in new intellectual challenges.

To begin with, educators have to broaden their understanding of what counts as 'reading and writing'. While there is general consensus amongst educators, parents and the wider community that literacy is a vital aspect of early childhood education, there is less agreement about what the word actually means. In contemporary context, the term is associated with more than just the traditional activities of reading and writing. It is increasingly used to take into account newer competencies, such as computer literacy, media literacy or visual literacy. Cope and Luke (2000) uses the term 'multiliteracies' to refer to literacy skills apart from reading and writing, such as the ability to interpret, decode, critique, and to



engage with texts on different levels. As Cope and Luke go on to argue, this creates 'a different kind of pedagogy', as educators have to look beyond conventional notions of literacy and traditional approaches of teaching reading and writing to enhance the learning experience for the child. This creates a challenging environment not only for children as learners, but for early childhood teachers who are expected to possess a wide range of pedagogical skills in the classroom. For practitioners, the challenge is to integrate the teaching of reading and writing within a pedagogical model that is appropriate for the pre-school stage, while at the same time valuing pre-schools as essentially places for play, exploration, socialisation, and a love for learning.


At the level of assessment, being innovative in teaching reading and writing also means having to reflect, evaluate, and develop new instruments of measurements to link the issue of literacy more closely to the new curriculum. Assessments can be made more formative rather than summative, where the teaching of reading and writing is not necessarily associated with tests, targets or levels of attainments. The teaching of literacy during the Early Years should not contribute to a process of 'schoolification', and the pre-school *Framework* should not be interpreted as a simplified version of the primary curriculum; nor should the early childhood stage of education be treated as preparation for later stages. The challenge for all educators is to prevent the teaching of reading and writing from being reduced to a checklist of outcomes, based on tests and worksheets. The main aim of literacy, especially at pre-school level, should be about helping children develop a desire and curiosity for reading and writing, and confidence in their own learning, rather than achieving a pre-specified level of knowledge or proficiency. Practitioners therefore need to move away from a so-called 'attainment-target' approach to a 'process-developmental' one, and strive for autonomy to decide on new pedagogical and assessment

approaches, and freedom to adopt these methods.

The *Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore* provides a reference for curriculum implementation and pre-school pedagogy, but like any curricular document, it should also allow scope for interpretation. The introduction of the *Framework* meant that all children aged 3 to 6 would be provided a basic, common pre-school education, with the aim of ensuring equality in Early Years provision, but at the same time, children's diversity must also be recognised. Each setting has to formulate its own interpretation of the *Framework* and adapt it to its own conditions, to allow for the curriculum to be contextualised. Teachers and educators should also develop the curriculum and curricular projects that responds to the needs of the children, and their social and cultural environment. In this way, early childhood education as a whole will be the first step towards achieving the government's vision of lifelong learning, and Early Years educators can continue to be innovators and interpreters of the curriculum, daring to change, question, and be different.

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The Impact of Using Videos to Teach Writing Skills

Magdalene Tan and Ruth Pakiam

Abstract

"For developing writers, being able to explore and express meaning comes from experience of hearing and watching stories, playing in role, becoming familiar with particular story or kinds of story. These may be watched on video, listened to as story tapes, enjoyed as puppet plays, danced or acted out in drama." (Bearne, 2002)

This study examined the impact of using video to boost narrative writing skills through an increase in sequencing and developing relevant ideas. Seventy-eight pupils in Primary Two were involved in a study conducted over a ten-week period. To determine the effectiveness of the intervention strategy, pre-tests and post-tests were carried out to assess the range of improvement at the end of the study. The post-test mean for the total orientation was significantly greater than the pre-test mean. The results suggest that teachers and educators of pupils in the foundation years should utilize video to arouse and stimulate interest and curiosity thereby enhancing the writing processes of budding writers.

Introduction

Rationale and Objectives

The process of writing begins with the foundation years. For narrative writing in the lower primary, pupils need to write a story based on a series of four related pictures and a given vocabulary list. These pupils have also been trained to plan and write stories with a clear introduction,

development and conclusion. The pupils write stories that are based on what they see and not on what they perceive. Not much inference is made and few pupils respond to the setting and the time factor that are not explicitly stated or shown in the set of pictures before them. Although some pupils capture the reader's attention with a leading introduction/suspense, most usually introduce their narrative with a mundane introduction like "One day..."



Even as these pupils continue to grow older, they lack the maturity to look beyond the pictures as to what could have caused the action in the first picture box, the second and so forth. The mediocre writing performance of these pupils could be due to their inability to write vividly which stems from their inability to focus more in depth on each part in the story.



It is important that these pupils be taught the skills to write effectively through the use of a video which would provide visual stimulus to help them comprehend and internalize better so as to spearhead their writing progress. They need to have a good foundation as writing becomes a more integral part of the language paper as they grow older.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Question: Does the use of video presentations result in improved narratives?

Hence, the researchers' hypothesis is that the improvement in content scores of pupils exposed to video presentations is higher than that of pupils without the exposure.

Literature Review

Research results on the impact of using videos/visuals to communicate ideas to young writers were partly instrumental in the team embarking on this project.

Pupils' writing is often influenced by pictorial narratives of different types such as comics, books, television, video and computer. "Moving images play an enormous role in children's lives. They

encourage children to talk about what they watch and they help to provide the appropriate language. Moving images can enhance the children's power to express and discuss their experiences more clearly and coherently". (Staples and Davies, 2001 quoted in Bearne, 2002). Using video as shared text allows for analysis of how a character is depicted and also as a basis for building 1st and 3rd person narrative retelling and for developing the use of connectives and varied conjunctions (Bearne, 2002).

One of the consequences of video watching, whether at home or in school, is its influence on the content of children's stories. According to a study quoted by Fox (1993), children in school drew extensively on TV material for their stories. It "clearly demonstrates that young children can learn much from the videos they watch and they can make such knowledge explicit. Those who work with young children should take account of such wisdom and make space in their classrooms for it to be explored and extended" (Bromley, 1996) and not regard video watching as less valuable than traditional school-based literacy practices as videos provide a wealth of experiences from which children can construct new meanings.

Further research indicates that using visual treatments in lessons enhances learning. In her paper, *Visual Literacy in Teaching and Learning: A Literature Perspective*, Suzanne Stokes mentions a study by Chanlin (1998) that reports how lessons with no graphics, still graphics, or animated graphics influence students with different prior knowledge levels as they attain descriptive knowledge. When prior knowledge is low, graphics, either still or animated, are better for learning descriptive texts than lessons with texts only. Students with a high level of prior knowledge of the subject responded better with the animated form of graphics in learning descriptive facts. Providing visual control of animated graphics enhances learning.

Children learn in very different ways is reinforced by a study conducted in America by Liu and Ginther (1999). They found that 20 – 30% of children were auditory learners; about 40% were visual; while the remaining 30 – 40% were tactual/kinesthetic or

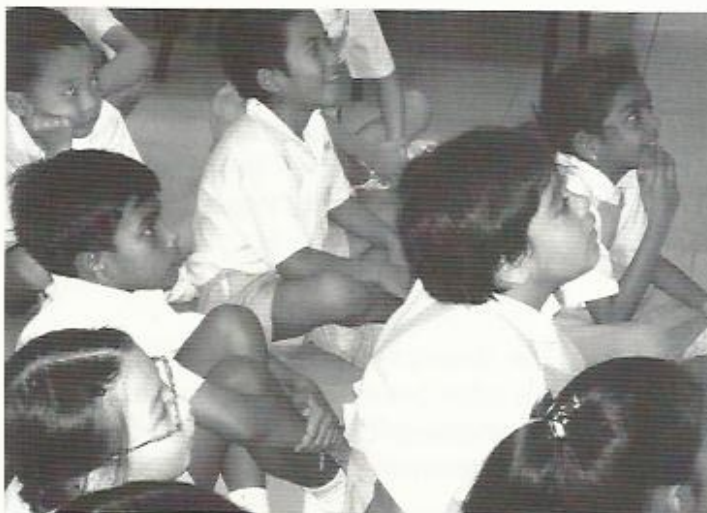
learning styles of the children. Using video is a viable option in catering to the learning styles of the majority of the students. "Animated pictures have an enabling function that allows the user to perform a higher degree of cognitive processing than with static pictures." (Schnotz 2002). Animated pictures can present different states of a subject matter, and provide more information to a learner thereby giving the students the opportunity to select more information for active processing by utilizing multiple sensory channels in their short-term memory (Lai quoted in Sankey).

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 78 pupils from two Primary 2 classes of a neighbourhood school. These pupils are in their foundation years and are still being trained in the rudiments of the writing process.

The content scores of their first composition in the first semester were taken and two classes of different mean content scores were chosen for the research. The classes had approximately the same number of males and females. The first class had a mean of 6.64 which indicated that the pupils were of average ability and could write satisfactory narratives. The second class on the other hand, had a lower mean of 4.26 and this showed



visual/tactual. That children are primarily auditory and visual learners is further augmented by another study by Vincent & Ross (2001) who found that 50% of the children were auditory learners while 33% were visual learners. Based on both studies, it could be concluded that children are primarily auditory and visual learners.

It is imperative therefore, that the instructional materials and strategies be matched with the auditory and visual

that they lacked the ability to captivate the reader's interest.

Process

Content component of the narrative accounted for a greater weightage and this component could be effectively trained in a given period of time. Pupils needed to be given more exposure for better scaffolding which in turn would lead to an increase of their content marks.

consent forms entrance
gathered Singapore Zoological Garden
concourse hippopotamus
boarded elephant show
alighted from trainer

As the study of the review literature indicated that visuals did have an impact on pupils, the researchers deliberated if video presentations of a given picture stimuli would enhance the content of the pupils' narratives. These presentations, which would present the plot and the different elements of the story in greater detail, would enable the pupils to write narratives with more captivating storylines.

The idea of using video to enhance content was then mooted. The Content marks obtained in Composition Writing Scores for SA1, 2005 for the two classes would then be compared with that of the Content marks for the composition done in SA2 2005 to determine the success of this research study.

The themes to be used for narrative writing for the Primary 2 classes were identified and these themes are found in the P2 prescribed text *"My Pal"*.

Intervention

Once the still pictures for a theme were selected, the script for the video presentation was written and edited. Pupils in the Drama Club were then enlisted to dramatize the scenes which were rehearsed and subsequently

filmed by videographers in the team. After completion of the video-editing, the video presentation would be ready for use.

Each English unit in the Primary 2 level ended with a writing task based on the prevailing theme for the two weeks. The pupils were taken through a 5-step process which covered 4 teaching periods:

STEP PROCEDURES

- 1 Viewing of video presentation of the theme
- 2 Study of the relevant static pictures
- 3 Replay of video presentation of the theme & pupils take notes on the details
- 4 Class discussion on the visuals using a set of teacher-prepared leading questions
- 5 Independent writing

Measures

C1 represents the content marks for the first composition done in SA1 in 2005 while C2 represents the content marks obtained in the Composition Writing scores for the SA2 in 2005. The measures, C1 and C2 for each class, were then compared to find the improvement that the pupils had made.

Results

The descriptive statistics are presented in the table below. From the results, we find that the mean baseline content score (C1) of the intervention group (Mean=4.26, SD=1.09)

Table: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics	Intervention			Control		
	C1	C2	Improvement	C1	C2	Improvement
Mean	4.26	6.44	2.18	6.64	7.69	1.05
SD	1.09	2.54	1.85	1.44	2.05	1.19
Mode	5.00	6.00	2.00	7.00	9.00	2.00
Q1	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	6.00	0.00
Median (Q2)	4.00	6.00	2.00	7.00	8.00	1.00
Q3	5.00	8.00	3.00	8.00	9.00	2.00
Quartile (Q-Q1)	1.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00

was lower than the baseline for the control group (Mean=6.64, SD=7.69).

As observed from the table, both groups had shown improvement – the Control group improved their mean by 1.05 and the Intervention group by 2.18. However, the improvement for the Intervention group was more than that for the Control group. The Intervention group had benefited from the Process Treatment that had been administered to them. The implication of this is that weaker students benefit more from intervention. With this, we feel that the Control group would have benefited even more if they had been exposed to the video presentations.

Feedback from the pupils and teachers were both positive and negative. Initially, all pupils welcomed the use of the videos but this sentiment did not last long for the more able pupils who felt stifled as they had to write on what they saw. The weaker pupils, on the other hand, liked it as they could actually visualize the whole story and thereby get the necessary scaffolding they needed. The story line of their compositions did show improvement. While the teacher of the Intervention group welcomed the use of the videos to teach narrative writing, she felt that such an approach would have been most beneficial to pupils weak in narrative writing.

Conclusion

The study shows that with the approach, the improvement for the pupils have been



greater than without the approach. The follow-up to this study will be to test the hypothesis with either (a) classes of similar abilities (two weak or two strong classes) but with providing intervention to only one or (b) to compare one weak class and one strong class with the same treatment. This would ascertain which step in the approach provides most improvement. This study could then lead to differentiated training programmes to suit the specific needs of the pupils in the class.

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Enhancing Composition Content using Storyline Teaching Method

Suriyanti Said, Yan Shiu and Lim Siew Gek (Facilitator)

Abstract

As an alternative teaching strategy, teachers guide pupils to use storyline method in composition writing. The Storyline approach is a strategy that was developed in Scotland for developing the curriculum as an integrated whole. It provides an opportunity for active learning and at the same time, it develops in learners a powerful sense of ownership of their learning.

In our teachers' adaptation of the storyline method, pupils are encouraged to write about their daily experiences in teams, culling ideas from different perspectives. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator while pupils discuss in teams. Using test data, pupils were distributed into 2 groups, with one as a control. A similar composition was given to both groups of pupils as a post test. An assessment checklist was also designed to measure the impact of their attitude towards writing composition as well as their command of vocabulary. Analysis was done using the t-test.

Introduction

Mother Tongue Composition lessons in local primary schools are usually teacher-centered, and closely aligned to the standard examination format used at the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), a placement examination at the end of the six years of primary school education. At the beginning of the lesson, a teacher would typically guide the class to discuss a common

4-column-picture or 6-column-picture table and the given list of helping words. Pupils would next be assigned to spend the rest of the lesson time to write individual pieces of work.

As every pupil would be writing on a common topic, based on a common story, the content of pupils' composition does not offer much variety and therefore is not



very interesting to the teacher. At the same time, there is little room for encouraging creativity amongst the pupils. Pupils with good command of the language often voice their suggestion that they would want to write on a more challenging topic, while a few of their classmates struggle on, not having the ability to complete their composition using simple sentences, even with the given helping words.

江家：妈妈（潘彩微）



我叫潘新宜，
是一名护士。
喜欢帮助人，
对人有爱心。

江家



奶奶



爸爸



妈妈



双胞胎



双胞胎



宝宝

依布拉欣小学
P4 CL

whole. It provides an opportunity for active learning and reflection as essential parts of effective learning and teaching. At the same time it develops in learners a powerful sense of ownership of their learning. This approach is widely used in the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands.

"People are very motivated particularly, if they are doing things which they like doing." (Low, 1996) This project aims to enhance pupils' mastery of composition and to encourage in pupils a richer writing of content in compositions, by adopting Storyline method in composition lesson over two terms of an academic year. We hope to engage our pupils in learning, by allowing them to imagine and to write beyond the given pictures. Teachers will take the facilitators' role to monitor the discussions and presentations. Pupils were encouraged to interact, to cooperate, and to ask

Pupils could only get feedback on their compositions a few days later, as marking will only begin after the lesson. It is often the case that pupils would likely to have forgotten what they have written by the time teacher's feedback gets back to them. When composition books are returned, pupils usually compare marks with one another, instead of reading through teacher's remarks. On the other hand, the teacher could not give feedback on every composition, as pupils would usually feel bored after listening to the first few feedback comments on a similar story. Thus, the learning from pupils' own mistakes are limited, so too the learning from their peers.

The MT teachers decided to use the Storyline method to change the current way of learning. In 1970s, Steve Bell, a Scottish educator, invented the storyline method with his team. Storyline is a strategy for developing the curriculum as an integrated

questions during group work. It is expected that the group taught with the storyline method to score better in their compositions and to be more motivated to write compared to the control group.

Method

Subjects This project was carried out on a P3 Malay Language class and a P4 Chinese Language class.

Malay Language (ML) pupils from Classes 3/1 and 3/2 were taught in the same classroom together before the project started. Two teachers were assigned to carry out peer-teaching in P3. After this, Teacher A used Class 3/1 (N=23) as her experimental group and Teacher B took on Class 3/2 (N = 23) as the controlled group. Pupils from these two Malay Language classes were of similar ability level and displayed similar attitudes towards the



Malay Language lessons. Based on the monthly test in February, pupils were evenly matched into 2 groups, based on similar levels of abilities. For the control group, they were divided into groups of 4, which then becomes their 'family'.

Teacher C, teaching the Chinese Language (CL) class, used Class 4A as her experimental group. She did not choose a control group since P4 Chinese pupils were already banded according to their P3 Semestral Assessment 2 results in Chinese Language, and Class 4A comprises of all pupils getting band 1 in Chinese Language. Class 4A had 29 pupils. The pupils formed 6 groups for composition lessons. All of them spoke mandarin with their parents and friends, and subscribed to the weekly Chinese newspaper (知识画报). None of them were required to join the P4 Chinese Language remedial class.

Design To create a randomized, controlled group, Teacher A sorted the ML pupils from the original class randomly into 2 classes, according to grades and gender only. This allows for a true experiment to be carried out, with the randomized group post-test only design. The independent t-test was used to compare the post-test results of Classes 3/1 and 3/2.

All CL pupils from Class 4A scored band 1 in the previous year's Semestral Assessment 2. Thus, Teacher C carried out a quasi-experiment, with the Single group pre- and post-test design. She used the first Semestral Assessment 1 composition scores that Class 4A wrote in the year as the pre-test. She would use the dependent t-test to compare the pre- and post-test results of Class 4A.

Measure Both teachers A and C used guided picture compositions as their pre-tests. The time allocated for the writing was 40 minutes for both groups.

Teacher A provided the standard 4 pictures sequence with guiding words for the writing. The pictures and guiding words were discussed with the class during the first 15 minutes of the lesson. The P3 pupils did not use dictionaries, while the P4 pupils used dictionaries for their composition. Teacher C on the other hand, used the scores for the mid-year examination as the pre-test scores. There was no discussion prior to the writing exercise, and the test was conducted under examination conditions.

Both teachers used the August monthly test (guided picture composition) as their post-tests. Pupils were not allowed to use a dictionary during the test. The duration of both the P3 and P4 tests was 40 minutes. The pre-tests and post-tests were marked according to the standard marking schemes for P3 and P4 compositions, by



the respective teacher of the classes. 10 marks are allotted for content and 10 marks for language.

Procedure Using the storyline method, pupils were arranged to sit in groups of 'families' to compose stories together based on daily life situations. Each member was given the freedom of choice in crafting a unique identity for their role in the 'family'. Each 'family' member was encouraged to think from the perspective of his/her selected role, during brainstorming and writing. They also took turns to look up words from a dictionary, to present the group work, and solicit feedback from their peers.

The storyline method was introduced to the experimental groups in early April. Pupils were given a week to know about the storyline method, to form 'families', and to design the faces and characteristics of each 'family' member. Pupils from the experimental groups had composition lessons on two consecutive days every alternate week. This arrangement allowed the pupils to finish their writing and presentation, while everything was still fresh in their minds. For the following week, they would rewrite the group compositions individually.

In the beginning, pupils were slow to respond as they were unfamiliar with group work and presentation. The 'families' built the stories together, wrote composition in groups and presented together. Every 'family' was to present and to get feedback during the presentation. At a later stage, CL pupils from Class 4A discussed in groups, but wrote compositions individually.



One member from each 'family' had to present and to get feedback during the presentation; whereas ML pupils from Class 3/1 continued to discuss and to write composition in groups.

Analysis For ML Classes 3/1 and 3/2, a comparison was made between the marks of the August monthly test, with the independent t-test. For CL Class 4A, a comparison was made between the marks of the SA1 and that of the August monthly test, with the dependent t-test.

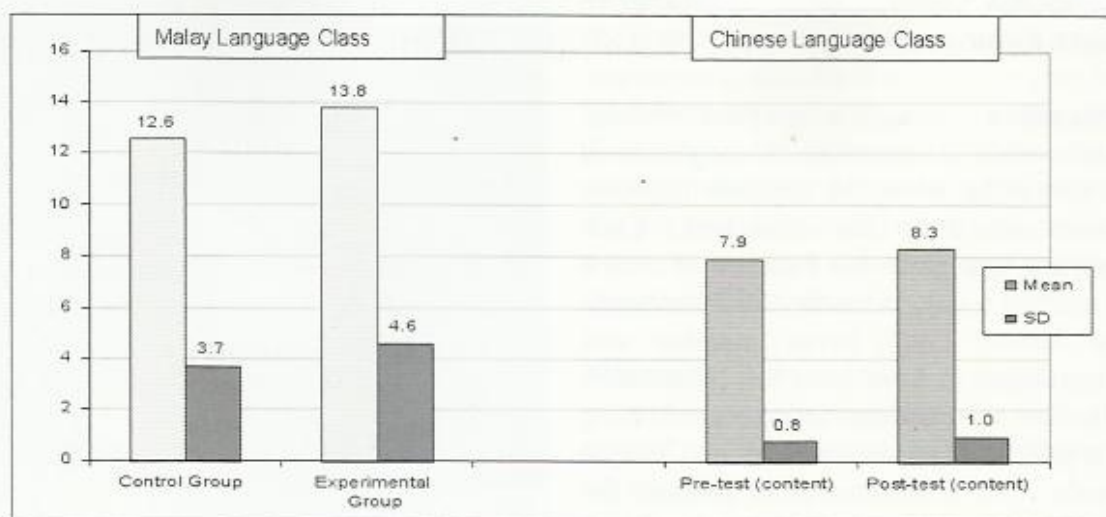
Results

As shown in Table 1 below, for the post-test, the experimental group has a mean of 13.8 (4.6) and the Control Group 12.6 (3.7). The independent t-test ran on the scores yielded a p-value of 0.34, indicating that the Experimental Group out-performed the Control group. (Figure 1). With an effect size of 0.32, there is a moderate effect size for the experimental group. The correlation of 0.15 is a very small positive correlation between both post-tests.

Table 1. Comparison on Post-tests for Both Language Classes

Malay Language Class				Chinese Language Class			
	N	Mean (Total)	SD (Total)		N	Mean (Content)	SD (Content)
Control Group	23	12.6	3.7	Pre-test (Content)	29	7.9	0.8
Experimental Group	23	13.8	4.6	Post-test (Content)	29	8.3	1.0

Figure 1: Graph of Results



As shown in Table 1, the experimental group has a mean of 7.9 (0.8) for its pre-test (Content) and 8.3 (1.0) for its post-test (Content). The dependent t-test ran on the scores yielded a p-value of 0.02, indicating that the post-test out-performed the pre-test significantly (Figure 2). There is a large effect size, 0.53, for the post-test. The correlation is 0.27; there is a very slight positive correlation between the pre-test and post-test.

Discussion and Recommendations

Besides the positive results in both classes, there are other indicators to show that pupils' composition content is enhanced with storyline method. Pupils found the storyline composition lesson meaningful and enjoyable. (Annex 3 and 4). It was also observed that pupils used an increasing trend of new vocabulary used in a family's composition over time. (Annex 5).

ML pupils also enjoyed the lessons and kept asking when the next composition lesson was going to be. During the discussions, the groups could be quite noisy. Both teachers A and C used a points reward system to motivate the pupils to be cooperative and attentive to instructions whenever the need arose.

The limitations of the project included possible effects from home tuition for some of the pupils, and the small class size. On the whole, the positive indicators from the project have been encouraging for the department. The project will be extended to the Tamil Language department in year 2007.

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Let's Collaborate to Write

Facilitating Writing in a Thinking and Collaborative Classroom

Halijah Redwan

The Challenge To Write

Before one weaves a piece of tapestry, some important choices have to be made, such as the choice of patterns and colours and maybe even the type of thread. Likewise, when writing stories, there are choices to be made.

Weaving stories may be effortless to some of our pupils but not to all.

To create a plot that captures the attention of readers and excite them, involves ideation, incubation of ideas, planning, revising drafts until the final product reaches a satisfactory standard that delights the readers. It is undeniable therefore that prewriting is a vital part of the writing process. Pupils need to generate

ideas and collaborate with one another in order to plan, visualize, incubate ideas & have their ideas evaluated. The skilful teacher needs to play his role as facilitator by creating opportunities that enable pupils to generate possibilities, develop and exchange ideas, confer, edit one another's work. He would need, through the employment of cooperative writing structures and thinking tools, to get pupils to learn more by engaging them in collaborative work.

Writing Skills... Nature or Nurture?

How does one teach writing? Can it even be taught or is it something that comes naturally to some and not to others? Parents and teachers alike often wonder, as they are faced with the challenge of



turning their charges into writers. I believe, the first thing to do for teachers as well as parents, is to see writing as a process more than anything else.

Pupil writers need time to develop their skills. They should be progressively taught the different skills in a structured manner. Specific techniques need to be mastered and practised. When different skills have been mastered, then only can pupil writers weave stories that are of a certain quality. Therefore teachers need to provide opportunities for such processes to take place before they can see the products of their pupil writers.

The Challenge to Teach Writing... My personal journey

The teaching of writing has been from the start of my teaching career, a very challenging task. Not much was available in the early days to help teachers help pupils ideate & think up creative ideas. The traditional method of helping pupils write has always been through reading model compositions and modifying them, calling them the writer's own. Such a thoughtless process was disturbing to me. Attempts at brainstorming were carried out through so-called "group work" that was unstructured, commonly known as "traditional" group work. Here, the brainstorming most times the responsibility fell on the workhorse in the group. The free-riders would benefit without effort. Individual accountability was not present. As I kept reminding pupils to think and create ideas, there emerged a sense of helplessness as I knew some of my pupils were not on task.

Also totally absent was the element of positive interdependence. Since this principle was not factored in the group task, members could operate individually. Thus no collaboration actually takes place. In some groups, the pupils worked individually such that it seemed senseless to call it group work. There was no positive interdependence as they need not depend on each other. There was no guarantee that

there would be improvement in the quality of writing. In order to improve grades and increase quality passes in English, it was of utmost importance that the quality of writing be improved.

I had to think up ways and means of conducting purposeful writing lessons that would help improve quality and at the same time, were meaningful and engaging. It was not until 1990 that I was introduced to the most wonderful pedagogy called Cooperative Learning which I now use widely in my teaching. It is also the basis upon which other supporting pedagogies are effected. At about the same time I was also introduced to Edward de Bono's CoRT (Cognitive Research Thinking) tools.

I saw the relevance of using the tools in some of my writing lessons and embarked on experimenting with them. Teaching writing has never been the same since then. It just gets better and more and more exciting as the possibilities seem limitless. With new tools such as mind maps and IT software, the teaching of writing has become a most exciting experience for me.

The Challenge To Write

Writing can be the most painful task to a pupil in a Singapore classroom or even in any part of the world. Given a title or a picture stimulus and be told to write a certain number of words on the situation is a daunting task for the pupil who is not a "natural writer". There is a multitude of issues to deal with. If pupils are not eased into the process, then quality is at stake. The process of writing involves ideation and the generation of possibilities. When pupils are not coerced into thinking, ideas will not be forthcoming. Then there is the issue of evaluating the ideas, determining what is and what is not within the realm of realism. Pupil writers tend to be unrealistic in the ideas that they create. Therefore there is a need for some structures to be employed to enable them to think and decide for themselves what is realistic and what is not. This is where collaborative

work comes into play. With collaboration ideas are evaluated, many points of view are given, exchanged and viable ideas are sieved out.

Many cooperative writing structures are suited to pre-writing. Strategies devised by Dr Spencer Kagan, such as Inside Outside Circle, Think-Pair-Share, Think-Write-Share, 4-S Brainstorming all support pre-writing activities. These structures may also be used with thinking tools such as SCAMPER (a thinking tool by Bob Eberle) Edward De Bono's CoRT tools such as PMI, CAF at the pre-writing stage in order to get pupils to ideate.

Careful crafting of questions by the teacher is the most important part of the entire pre-writing process. What is it that is in the writing task that is important and has to be carefully considered and what issues have to be determined before pupils proceed to ideate and generate possibilities. It is important that the teacher pre-determines this as it is the pivot point on which the rest of the writing task balances.

Prewriting demands a lot of time, as once the ideas are generated, there must be a plan of some sort to put the ideas together into a whole picture before writing can take effect.

In the writing stage that follows, writers strive to relate the content of their ideas. Pupil writers write quickly without careful considering to the clarity and precision of their thinking. Habits of Mind are also brought in at this stage where pupils are reminded of the intelligent behaviour of Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision and the attributes of which they are to embrace in the process of writing. Until we teach them otherwise, they will consider their first dash of writing to be the finished product. Neophyte writers must be taught that to be effective writers they must return to their first draft to consider improvement and clarification. Peer editing using cooperative structures such as One Stray, Three Stay allows the

task of editing to be executed quickly and in a fun sort of way.

Writing, to me is not a game of chance where pupils write better if it is a "topic that they like" as often thought. The act of writing is a complex journey where the writer must be jolted into articulating things that he knows and understands, incidents that he has witnessed and experienced. Writing clarifies and deepens thinking. There is a strong connection between writing and thinking, writing and learning and I am striving to help my pupils build the links between them.

My Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing

Writing is a process, a cyclical one. It revolves around pre-writing, writing, proofreading, editing, rewriting and publishing.

Before writing, a significant amount of stimulus must be provided to the pupil writers to stimulate their thinking and to tease out ideas from them. They may think at the start that they are not able to write given the situation as they do not even realise what they do know and what they understand. It is the task of the teacher, therefore, to create the awareness in pupil writers of what they know and build on those ideas.

This is where cooperative learning comes into play. Cooperative learning and writing, as Dr Spencer Kagan puts it, is "a natural marriage". Cooperative learning is a communicative process and likewise, writing. One process supports the other. Through cooperative learning pupil writers learn to trust and develop their own ideas and points of view. Working in a non-threatening environment, leads to the birth of many ideas. An excellent example is 4-S Brainstorming where pupils are encouraged to articulate as many ideas as possible without any team member passing judgment..... "any idea is a good idea!" With such brainstorming rules in place, pupils do not hold back and the



chance of generating possibilities increases manifold.

When pupils feel safe, they can express themselves.

Cooperative Learning enables pupils to receive peer support, view the world through the eyes of others when they listen to their peers' ideas and opinions. It also provides a safe, interactive context which fosters fuller expression and eliminates inhibition.

A Peek Into My Writing Class

All writing lessons begin with pre-writing activities. These activities take the form of Cooperative Learning activities. Cooperative writing as mentioned earlier revolves around a hub of pre-writing, writing, proofreading editing, rewriting and publishing.

Pupils are made to study the topic or writing task assigned.

Let's take a topic as an example:

You and your friends were in the swimming pool having fun. When you looked up, you saw something flying in the sky, towards the pool. Write a story based on the situation.

At the start, questions are posed to them. Questions such as :

"What is the most important factor that you must consider for this task that will determine the plot and make exciting and unique so that readers will want to read on?"

Once the pupils have determined such the factor, they have to generate a list of possibilities. They then have to consider if the ideas as to what the object is, are realistically possible by studying the question again. Where could the object come from? Who tossed it out? Why?

This is what I call "framing their thinking" It is important, I feel that they evaluate their ideas before using them in their plot. After sieving the ideas that they had generated they will choose an idea and work on it.

Here they will create an outline using a mind map or graphic organiser. After this they would write the first draft using Simultaneous Roundtable, where each individual take turns to give input.

At every stage in the processes mentioned above the pupils would be working in their cooperative learning groups. A number of structures can be employed at this stage.

Think Pair Share can be used at the beginning when pupils are asked what factor they have to carefully consider in the question before they begin to plan. Give One Get One can be used to generate possibilities, in a fun and interactive manner, as to what the object could be.

This, to me is teaching less and learning more as pupils take control of their learning through interactive and meaningful activities, leaving the teacher as a guide and facilitator. The teacher here plays a vital role in scaffolding activities, asking relevant questions that will probe and incite pupils to think. No pupil will be passive as the principles of cooperative learning are intact ie pupils are positively interdependent, there is individual accountability as at one stage each individual will have to make an individual contribution and may even have to present it to her group or class. There is also simultaneous interaction as all pupils are actively participating when a structure such as Give One Get One. Equal Participation is also factored in when pupils take turns. Gone are the "perils of traditional group work"!

After the first draft has been plotted, it is time to evaluate the draft.

Here is where peer editing or peer critiquing comes into play. Using a structure called "One Stray Three Stay", pupils representatives are sent out to other groups to have their stories evaluated. Here is where pupils read their friend's story plan (from the "visitor") and critique it. Prior to this, I would have taught them how to "critique".

By asking relevant questions. There would have been practice sessions where the entire class would practise together with me, the sort of questions to ask. Gambits or question starters could be given to pupils to help them ask the relevant questions. These questions are noted by the "owner" of the story plan and then she returns to her home group. Another member of her group is sent out to yet another group for

comments and feedback. After all four have been sent out or if time does not permit, then two are sent out, the group convenes again and consider the comments and address the questions. They make adjustments to the plot and then rewrite the draft. At this stage I may ask them to do individual work.

The quality of the work I receive is far better than what could be expected from just doing a class brainstorming or putting up a word splash contributed by everyone.

The pre-writing activities take up a lot of time but to me it is time well invested as the returns are high.

By the time pupils write their stories they would have benefited tremendously from their interactions with their peers. Just imagine the synergy at every stage... the rich discussion, exchange of ideas, building upon each other's ideas. There is a lot of thinking, evaluating taking place.

In some other instances with other topics, thinking tools are brought in. Tools that I had mentioned earlier, such as SCAMPER, CoRT tools such as PMI and CAF are factored in at the pre-writing stage to help guide pupils thinking and help them create realistic, exciting and unique plots.

This is how "Cooperative Writing" lessons are carried out in my class.

Reflections

Necessity is the mother of invention... very true indeed for me where delving into the pedagogy of teaching writing is concerned. It started off with frustration and desperation. Desperate at how to teach pupils to write stories that are realistic, entertaining to the reader... ME! With an average of forty compositions to grade every fortnight, I decided that I was not going to leave things to chance and pray for a miracle. I first had to make a list of all the problems that recurred in my pupils stories. They did not differ much

between the cohorts that I taught each year.

I got into action. In my fourth year of teaching, when I was introduced to Cooperative Learning, I studied the different strategies and thought of ways of how the structures could be used and at which stage in the writing process.

Along with Cooperative Learning, I was blessed to be introduced to thinking skills programme, Edward de Bono's CoRT tools such as Plus Minus Interesting (PMI), Consider All Factors (CAF) provide excellent framework and open up opportunities for pupils to think up ideas, evaluate them and build on them.

With so much of thinking factored in at every part of the pre-writing stage, collaboration and discussion, stories produced by my pupils are more "refreshing" and are far from the run-of-the-mill sort.

Helping Others In The Fraternity

Time is always a challenge. I encounter this with every writing lesson. However I have never allowed this to deter me from conducting Cooperative Writing lessons. It is my deep belief in the benefits of collaborative work and the way writing should be taught that has helped us persist. "Quality versus quantity" ... this is a dilemma I face often but I both believe in quality so I have pressed on with pre-writing activities. Process here is as important as product. So far my pupils have reaped the benefits. One of the take-aways from these types of lessons is what I call "the hidden gains" The values from social skills that they are taught to embrace and subsequently embrace unconsciously. This is so well woven into Cooperative Learning activities and is precious. Values such as appreciating other people's opinion, praising and listening actively.

Teaching writing has become more meaningful and exciting. It feels good to be

able to plan meaningful activities at the pre-writing stage.


Writing becomes purposeful when pupils take charge of the plot, make decisions as to how they want the plot to end.... whether it is going to have a tragic ending or if it is going to leave the readers guessing as to what actually happens to the protagonist or antagonist. Pupils are empowered to make their stories their own and not reproduce stories based on model compositions that they had memorised. Pupils are fully engaged and with Cooperative Learning and pupils take charge of their learning, leaving me to assume the role of facilitator.

This is, to me, Teach Less Learn More in progress.

I have shared my lessons and opened up my class to colleagues and members of the teaching fraternity. There is a sense of fulfilment in seeing and knowing that others have tried out in their lessons and that many pupils are benefiting from and enjoying writing which can be so painful and burdensome to many pupils. Hopefully many pupils have overcome this phobia to write. A challenge would be to convince others to take on the challenge and invest the time to make writing lessons alive and meaningful and make writing lessons enjoyable and manageable.

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How Much Do Young Children Know About the Story?

Laureen Y. M. Lee and Cheung Wing Sum

Introduction

Being able to read is not just being able to say all the words in the sentence. Instead, it involves the audience actively constructing meaning through an integrated process in which they interact and transact with the words on the page integrating new information with preexisting knowledge structures (Flood and Lapp, 1991). However, it is also important to recognize that comprehension may have several meanings: it could be recalling a text, answering questions about the character, decoding the theme, or critiquing the structure (Van Den Broek and Kremer, 2000).

Problems in assessing young children's comprehension skills

The mode of assessing comprehension at a preschool level is often done in one of two ways. For non-proficient readers, comprehension can be assessed in a verbal manner, and for the proficient readers, the same can be achieved through written exercises such as circling the correct answers or presenting the answers in a written form. Such an assessment is an informal one where the detail of each child's understanding of a story being told is often undocumented and sometimes unnoticed.

Our experience indicates that students come from a multitude of backgrounds. Some children come from overseas with English as a second language, while others may have had little exposure to English if their primary caregivers have been dialect-speaking maids or grandparents. There are also children on the other end of the scale who are very exposed to English and speak

the language to their peers. These children at the preschool are mostly geared up to join our local primary school where they are expected to engage in written and listening comprehension activities as a form of assessment.

Aim of the study

The objective of this study is to investigate the level of comprehension in preschool children. In order to measure the their comprehension abilities, we will develop rubrics to evaluate their comprehension abilities, and identify a tool to measure their comprehension abilities.

Research Question

This study aims to shed light on the following question:

1. To what extent are preschoolers able to comprehend the story?

Literature Review

Much has been said about the reading comprehension of language learners in numerous books and journal articles. The first part of the review will focus on comprehension in general. The second part will feature how comprehension is assessed, and finally, the mode of assessment in this study – retelling.

Comprehension

Children construct meaning of text based on three cueing systems:

- **Syntactic cues** – grammatical cues like word order, function words and ending words

- **Semantic cues** – cues from each sentence and from the evolving whole, as one progresses through the entire text
- **Grapho/phonemic cues** – letter/sound cues; the correspondence between letters and sounds and larger letter sound patterns. (Weaver 1988)

The Rees and Shortland-Jones 1995 'First steps' reading continuum was developed to focus on children's reading milestones and development at six different phases. Phase 1 involves children role-play reading, and each successive phase eventually amounts to Phase 6 in which children are reading at an advanced level. This reading continuum classifies reading comprehension into 3 different levels. Parallel to the cueing systems mentioned earlier are **Making Meaning at Text Level**, **Making Meaning Using Context** and **Making Meaning at a word Level**. Behaviors exhibited by the Phase 3 Early Readers are described below:

Comprehension requires the student to synthesize what he or she believes are the key concepts, ideas, or points of a given topic or content area of knowledge domain.

The student must define the key elements generated and then identify and define the relationship between the elements identified and defined. This is the way to demonstrate comprehension (Dagostino & Carifio 1994, p.96).

Rees and Shortland-Jones (1995) give explicit indicators for teachers to categorize their students in the different phases. Suggested activities are also given to help the students at the different levels. Rees and Shortland-Jones (1995) have the following beliefs: (1) The central purpose of reading is to gain meaning from print, (2) Reading is an active process of constructing Meaning. To sum it up, Reading Means Comprehension.

According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), the learning process of a child may be classified in the following levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. From Bloom's point of view, comprehension means an understanding of what was read. In recent years, some educators apply his taxonomy in assessing reading comprehension. After reading the material, an individual may recall specific information (knowledge level), understand the facts in the material (i.e.

Behaviours Exhibited by Phase 3 Early Readers

Making Meaning at Text Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beginning to read familiar text confidently and can retell major content from visual and printed texts • Can identify and talk about a range of different text forms such as letters, lists, recipes, stories, newspaper and magazine articles • identifies the main topic of a story and supplies some supporting information
Making Meaning Using Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates understanding of one to one correspondence between spoken and written words • uses picture cues and knowledge of context to check understanding of meaning
Making Meaning at Word Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a bank of words which are recognized when encountered in different context e.g. in a book, on the whiteboard or a chart. • relies heavily on beginning letters and sounding out for word identification strategies

comprehension level), convert abstract content to concrete situations (i.e. application level), compare and contrast content (i.e. analysis level), organize ideas, concepts, and information from content (i.e. synthesis level), and evaluate characters, actions, and outcomes (i.e. problem solving level) (Omaha Public Schools, 2005).

Looking at both models of comprehension, comparing the Rees and Shortland-Jones indicators to Bloom's Taxonomy, it appears that the first (Schank, Berman et al. 1999) model gives clear indicators of what behaviors children at different reading levels will exhibit. Bloom's taxonomy is focused on children who may already be readers and are able to comprehend at a deeper level, and therefore we believe is not appropriate to apply it to the preschoolers in this study. Perhaps in a separate study, it will be interesting to assess and evaluate, then to plot the results according to the developmental levels of Bloom's taxonomy to observe the progress of the preschoolers. Currently, we believe the preschoolers will only be able to achieve the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, whereby they are able to recognize and recall details of the main ideas, sequence and character traits.

Assessing Comprehension

Comprehension can be assessed in a variety of ways. In this paper, the focus is assessing children's understanding of a story through their construction and reconstruction of the story. Traditionally, story comprehension is hardly measured in early childhood, and only at a literal level when it is. A child was assessed for comprehension by getting the him or her to answer a series of questions after the story was read. More often than not, the questions typically provided only one avenue for assessing comprehension and as a result, only one perspective of the child's understanding of the story. Students usually responded succinctly and were not encouraged to elaborate. Therefore, the

assessment was dependent on the questions asked and rather than the subject's response. (Morrow, 1990).

For preschoolers and younger primary school students, comprehension can be reflected in several ways, and not only the traditional way of answering a set of questions. Allen, L., Barrett-Pugh, C. and Sinclair, A. (1996) highlight some novel ways to reflect and assess the comprehension of said children. Of the several ideas presented in their book, we will examine the process of retelling as a mode of comprehension assessment.

Retelling

Retelling involves all aspects of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. It enhances comprehension at word, sentence and whole text levels, and it requires readers to recall, select, organize and summarize information. According to some educators, there are different kinds of retelling:

- **Oral to oral retelling** is suitable for non readers and non writers. The teacher tells a story and children retell the story to a partner.
- **Oral to written or drawing retelling** is suitable for immature and mature readers/ writers. Teacher tells the story and students retell story in a written form or draw segments of the story out.
- **Written to oral retelling** require students to read the text and the to retell it to a partner or a group (Rees, Raison, Shortland-Jones, Barratt-Pugh, Sinclair, Dewsbury, & Lambert 1995, p.97).

Instrument

One of the most prominent aspects of a young child's language learning is his or her development of oral language. A child first learns to listen and understand before he or she learns to speak, and later on, to read. In a preschool and home setting, children

are continually exposed to stories read to them by parents and teachers. Storytelling plays an important role in supporting early literacy acquisition.

The basic assumption among researchers is that retelling indicates something about the reader's assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and therefore, reflects comprehension (Gambrell, Pfeiffer and Wilson, 1985). In their study, Gambrell, Pfeiffer and Wilson suggested that comprehension requires organization, and that engaging in the retelling of text-acquired information focuses the reader's attention on holistic comprehension. The process of retelling is also an opportunity for the reader to engage in verbal repetition or rehearsal of the text information.

For this study, the process of retelling was modelled to the students several times before they were assessed. At this point, it is important to review some key strategies used to assess their comprehension level. Some educators suggested that discussing the story before and after aids the students in retelling (Rees, Raison, Shortland-Jones, Barratt-Pugh, Sinclair, Dewsbury, & Lambert 1995). Teachers were also encouraged to use props or pictures to help cue the students into remembering the key parts of the story. Morrow and Smith (1990) suggested that the guidelines for the story focus on the four elements of the story structure:

Setting: introduction of characters, time and place.

Theme: an initiating event that causes the main character to react and form a goal or face a problem.

Plot episodes: events in which the main character attempts to attain the goal or solve the problem.

Resolution: attainment of the goal or solution of the problem and the story ending.

To simplify jargon for preschoolers, Rees, Raison, Shortland-Jones, Barratt-Pugh, Sinclair, Dewsbury, & Lambert (1995) came up with a simple guideline, with picture cues to help prompt students to recall vital information from the story.

1. **When** did the story happen?



2. **Who** were in the story?



3. **Where** did the story take place?



4. **What** happened in the story?



5. **Why** did it happen?



6. **How** did the story make you feel?



Allen (1996) stated that 'Story production requires a generalized knowledge of narrative structure and the ability to create logical story segments. Story retelling is not simply a recall activity. It reveals children's strengths and weaknesses in handling narrative comprehension.' With respect to instructional strategy, she noted that 'developing any oral language skill requires a reflective teaching approach. It involves skilful observation of children's performance, sensitive structuring and support.' (Allen 1996, p.101)

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study are drawn from Kindergarten One students from the researcher's preschool. There are exactly 26 students that form the 2 Kindergarten One classes in the preschool. Due to time restraints, the small amount of accessibility to the students and the limited resources for

this study, only 50% of the students will be randomly chosen to represent the results for the entire group. The 13 students will be divided into 2 categories: those born in the months of January to June and those born in the months of July to December.

Materials

A short narrative story was used in each of the modeling and test sessions. The stories to be selected are part of the Rigby Reading Series, specifically from the Grade 2B level.

Rubrics

The test instrument devised for this study with the preschoolers is mainly adapted

from Allen's First Steps Narrative Indicators. A similar framework will be used as it will retain the same headings. Concurrently, Morrow's layout of the story structure will be incorporated so a simple scoring system may be established.

Procedures

Four training sessions were conducted with the subjects in a group setting and one-to-one sessions. Specifically, the first two modeling sessions were group sessions, and the last two were conducted on a one-to-one basis, which were identical to the testing session. The teacher reading the story used the following strategies (Rees, Raison, Shortland-Jones, Barratt-Pugh, Sinclair, Dewsbury, & Lambert 1995):

Levels/Story Structure	Beginning (1)	Developing (2)	Consolidating (3)	Score (max 3 marks)
Setting (When) (Where)	Unable to define setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Forest" • "Bear's house" 	Gives a clear picture of when and where the story took place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Long Time ago" • "Deep in the forest" 	
Characters (Who)	Offers list of items or actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Goldilocks" • "Bears" 	Begins to identify characters, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Goldilocks has gold hair" • "3 bears: Papa, Mama & Baby" 	Elaborates details to provide further information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Goldilocks was hungry, and so she went into the bears' house" • "The 3 bears were upset that their house was in a mess" 	
Problems to be solved (What) (Why)	Provides one word statement pointing at picture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Ate porridge" • "Bears angry" 	Begins to identify problems and endings of story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Goldilocks ate the porridge. The bears got angry and chased her away" 	Begins to link character traits with reasons for problem of story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The bears were upset that their house was in a mess, so they went out for a walk to wait for the porridge to cool, but now Goldilocks had eaten the porridge and broke baby bear's chair" 	
Sequence	Does not link the story together	Begins to integrate the sequence of the events in correct order	Sequences events appropriately supplying supporting detail	

Before Reading: Teacher is to show the book, discuss the title, illustrations, and the author. Then, the teacher is to open the book and display it page by page, while encouraging the children to look at the pictures and to predict what the story could be about.

During Reading: Highlight the characters of the story and their names. Talk about the setting of the story and its location. Interrupt the story at intervals to ask if the children are enjoying it so far, and if so, to ask what they liked about the story so far. Ask them to predict the outcome of the story, and then confirm the story line as reading continues.

After reading: The teacher is to get the children to focus on the structure of the story. On the white board, the teacher will display the card pictures featured above to prompt the children to identify the main parts of the story by asking the above mentioned questions.

The test story was taped in advance, and played for the individual students in a separate classroom. To provide a meaningful context for the retellings, students were informed that their story retellings will be videotaped so that the younger children could listen to them. The student was then asked to recall either aided by the researcher or prompted with picture symbols representing the important parts of the story. The retelling of the story was then transcribed and graded against the above rubric.

Validity

The Rubric compiled above has since been circulated amongst a group of 3 Kindergarten one and 3 Kindergarten two experienced teachers in order to get some feedback pertaining to the different categories and skill level of Kindergarten One students aged between 4 and 5. Four of them commented on how the rubric appeared to be well laid out and the selection of questions — 'who', 'what' 'when' and 'why' — was specific enough to garner responses

from the children. Two teachers from the group brought up the issue of the children's vocabulary level in the context of answering the questions, as well as the personality of the children during the test situations which may influence the results collected.

The stories chosen for this study were also circulated amongst the teachers at the meeting. They mentioned that the stories were short enough to maintain the students' attention span yet long enough to have a complete a story line in it. The language used in the story was simple and easily understood. All teachers agreed that the stories were suitable for the age group of the students selected for this study.

Reliability

In order to ensure reliability in this study, each of the stories the students heard were recorded in advance on a cassette for the Modeling Session and test Session. In this way, the researcher can ensure that every student involved in the study heard the story presented exactly the same way, even if he or she listened to several replays of it. The consistent use of the pre-recorded story for both the modeling and test situations to ensure that students are familiar with what is being expected of them during the test as it has already been modeled for them. The flashcards shown to the children during the modeling and test session were identical, so the children would be familiar with what was asked of them.

Results and Findings

In response to the research question,
1. To what extent are preschoolers able to comprehend the story?

In this assignment, to be able to comprehend the story meant that the student was able to retell the story correctly. The content of the story's retell is then evaluated to reflect comprehension of the story by the student. Findings from this small scale research indicate that the

majority of K1 children are at a developing level of comprehension as they are able to give brief details of the story and they are also able to respond to the story content. However, there were a number of students who were able to give more than just the brief details and relate the story to their own experiences.

Strengths

Some of the children were able to give factual answers to the specific questions. In the results of this study, 75% of them were able to answer the 'who', 'where', 'what' and 'why' questions, and 16% of them were able to give additional details on the characters and settings. These questions were closed ended and had only right or wrong answers. However, there were variations in the students' answers in terms of character background and details.

Weaknesses

Observations taken during the sessions revealed that there were variations in the children's behavior and confidence during group modeling sessions and the testing sessions. Their behavior and responses were somewhat different in the different settings. Ultimately, the children were more comfortable being a group, similar to their classroom learning experiences. To be

taught on a one-to-one basis by the researcher was unusual, as there was pressure to give some kind of response.

Children at the centre coming from bilingual environments were limited in their vocabulary to express themselves clearly. There were hardly any other types of responses when they were asked how the story made them feel. They mostly answered that the story made them feel 'happy' and that they enjoyed the story, as though the term 'happy' was a correct answer to give in order to seek approval.

Setting

Most of the children were able to look at the background pictures of the story to identify where the story took place at different parts. They gave brief details such as 'in the beginning, it was at his home, then the boy was in the shops and in the end it was on the road. During the testing session, the children were not asked when the story took place as there was no indication in any of the tape recorded stories. In all the five tape-recorded stories, neither mentioned 'a long time ago' or 'one day,' hence the question was left out. For this test instrument, the setting of the story could not be completely identified, and it could only be confined to the physical location of where the story took place.

Table 1: Findings on story structure and levels

Setting	Beginning	Developing	Consolidating
When Where	8.3%	75%	16.6%
Characters	Beginning	Developing	Consolidating
Who	41%	33%	25%
Problems to be solved	Beginning	Developing	Consolidating
What Why	0%	58.3%	41.6%
Sequence	Beginning	Developing	Consolidating
	0%	58.3%	41.6%

Characters

When asked who the important people were in the story, most of the children identified the main characters of the story as Carlos and Andy. Some of the children were able to mention others like, Andy's mother who was always with him and his friends. Those who were competent readers would look through the book again and specifically name minor characters including the shopkeepers and Carlos' pet dog Spike, who was mentioned briefly at the very beginning of the story.

Problems to be solved

All the children were able to look through the book and talk about what was actually taking place in the illustrations. Most of their answers were short—one sentence per picture—but it briefly described what had happened as told on the pre-recorded tape. They were also able to answer why it was important that Carlos saved the little boy. Those in the consolidating level were able to give more details of the story, and began to relate the story to their own experiences. One student mentioned how his mother had reminded him not to cross the road without an adult; another student paraphrased the story into his own words and even came up with additional dialogue that might have been said in the story. 'There is still another level of comprehension where one relates one episode of knowledge to another' (Santa 1981, P. 158). There were also different responses from the children which reflected their thought processes towards the story. All the children were asked at the end, 'How did the story make you feel?' Most children mentioned 'happy' and were able to point out which part of the story they especially liked. One girl mentioned that she didn't like the story because it must have been painful for Carlos' friends to be lassoed by him and that it must have also been painful for the little boy, Andy, whom Carlos lassoed by the waist and pulled. Such responses of the children caught the researcher by surprise.

Sequence

Being able to use the book as a reference allowed the children to keep the plot of the story in order. They would start at the beginning of the book, and subsequently progress towards the end of the story. Some children who were beginning readers managed to read some of the words at the bottom of the pages and also filled in their own words to retell the story from beginning to end. Others who were limited in their reading and spoken ability simply described the story by explaining the researcher what was happening in the illustrations on each page.

Conclusion

The Retelling rubric was able to identify the different categories such as beginning, developing and consolidating, and it also allowed the researcher to identify the level of comprehension of 4 to 5 year old children. However, it was unable to test if the children acquired any knowledge or skills that they could subsequently use in their later learning experience which would then reflect true comprehension. Retelling is said to be a highly potent generative learning strategy, and that it has direct, beneficial consequences for children's processing of subsequent texts. (Gambrell, Pfeiffer & Wilson, 1985).

Retellings vary with such factors as (1) age, development and proficiency of the reader, (2) form of retelling (oral vs. written, unaided vs. probed), and (3) structure and content of the text. (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983 p. 396). As mentioned earlier, the results of this research could be slightly altered if the test situation or modelling session was conducted in the children's normal class setting and if it was conducted by their form teacher whom they would be more comfortable with.


Given more time and resources, this study could be enhanced to reveal more details on children's thought processes and their comprehension abilities. At the school, the

children are hardly formally assessed on their comprehension abilities. Teachers evaluated their students based on informal observations at a basic level, which revealed whether or not the student understood the story or instructions given, rather than the depth of understanding or comprehension.

Having better knowledge of the individual children's abilities enables the teacher to plan lessons that will provide opportunities for the students to acquire more skills which would equip them to better comprehend. While storytelling or reading a story is a daily classroom affair, more time should be spent afterwards to discuss the moral of the story, character background, and the children's reactions and responses to the story. For example, the children could write letters to the character in the story or dramatize the story. As mentioned in the literature review, there are many other ways to reflect comprehension of a story, for example, story maps or writing the story out in a different form. Having explored other options to assess and reflect comprehension in preschoolers, it is then up to the teachers to implement the appropriate learning activities for his or her students.

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Hierarchical Versus Open-Ended Approaches in Reading Instruction

Dr Marlow Ediger

Approches for reading instruction may be classified in terms of being hierarchical versus being open-ended. The former are more highly structured as compared to the latter. The structured approach is sequenced more closely and the methods of teaching to be used are more direct with a manual stating clearly how to teach reading. Various approaches for instructing reading are discussed here with the most structured being listed first, followed sequentially by those that are less structured. A brief

explanation is given for each. Additionally, the perceived weaknesses of each are enumerated.

Programmed Reading

The programmer determines the objectives and each step of learning in what is known as programmed reading. Thus, a pupil reads a sentence or paragraph and then responds to a multiple choice test item. If the learner is correct, he is rewarded. If incorrect, the pupil also sees the correct answer and is still ready for the next sequential item of read, respond, and check. This sequence is followed continuously. The teacher supervises so that pupils are on task. Otherwise, the learner may move forward on his own in programmed reading.

With quality field tested programmes, pupils make few mistakes since the steps of learning are very tightly ordered. These field tested programmes have been developed so that a pupil's responses are correct, approximately, ninety-five per cent of the time. The teacher needs to make certain that each pupil has the appropriate programme where success in learning is in evidence, initially. Continuous progress might then come about.



Weaknesses of programmed reading include the following:

- the highly structured procedure may not meet the needs of certain pupils
- learning styles of selected pupils may desire a more open-ended approach
- the sequence may be too slow in moving forward for the talented, in particular
- it presents a fragmented approach in teaching reading with read, respond, and check
- the entire programme is determined by the writer with no pupil/teacher input (Ediger, 2005).

Systematic Phonics

Advocates of systematic phonics procedures in reading instruction believe that pupils need to experience a comprehensive programme of sound (phoneme) symbol (grapheme) relationships. A definite sequence of phonics learning might then be in evidence. Such learning is to assist pupils to identify words when reading. Mastering grapheme/phoneme relationships, hopefully, will make for better readers in society. Thus, if a person does not know a word, he may sound it out. Phonics is then a key to correct recognition of words. Good sequence indicates pupils learning increasingly more complex phonics. Writers of texts differ in how much phonics should be learned in isolation and how much must be integrated into reading for meaning. However in either case, phonics is to be a key to developing better readers.

Disadvantages for a systematic phonics programme of instruction for young learners, in particular, include the following:

- it emphasizes abstract learnings when children need more of the concrete and semi-concrete
- too many words lack consistency between grapheme/phoneme relationships
- there is little evidence that pupils will transfer isolated phonics learning to actual reading of content

- abstract learning may minimize interest in reading (See Brown, 2003).

Scripted Reading

The Open Court series is a good example of scripted reading. Scripted reading has content for pupils to read with heavy emphasis placed upon what the teacher is to say in teaching. This stresses a teacher proof programme of reading. The emphasis being that the writers of the Open Court series have determined specifically what teachers are to say in teaching reading involving each story in the reader. Sequential stories and skills to be taught have also been determined by the writers of the readers. Some reading specialists believe that teacher-proof materials are essential for a good reading programme. Then teachers lacking teaching skills have a formal guide to follow. Weaknesses of a scripted reading programme include the following:

- it omits creative teaching by classroom teachers
- pupils are held to exact answers to questions raised in the script; creativity on the pupil's part is then lacking
- the teacher may have better methods of teaching to provide for individual differences
- boring methods of teaching might then be in the offing (Ediger and Rao, 2000).

Basal Readers

The manual section of a basal reader may be used, in a manner, where it might come close to being scripted. Otherwise, a manual may be used in a flexible manner. Thus, there are suggestions for objectives for students to achieve, as well as phonics, comprehension, and evaluation activities. The reading teacher also may use his own teaching suggestions in order to provide for individual differences. Thus, depending upon how it is used, the manual may be somewhat prescriptive or somewhat open-ended. The stories chosen by the editors

of the basal are generally followed in sequence for teaching as presented in the basal. The teacher might relate stories in the basal to other curriculum areas such as science and social studies. Disadvantages given for basal reader use are the following:

- pupils may well crave the use of other reading materials. This would also be true of previously discussed reading programmes
- one size does not fit all. Pupils differ in achievement and then need a differentiated reading curriculum
- sameness in experiences might be in evidence when basals are used daily by the teacher.

Basal readers differ from each other in terms of how much phonics is stressed as compared to meaning in reading (See Brabham and Villaume).

Big Book Approach

In the Big Book approach, the teacher chooses an interesting library book which is large enough to see by a small group of six to seven pupils. The contents must be clearly visible to all. The teacher discusses the illustrations with pupils making comments and raising questions. The teacher then reads aloud a few pages, pointing to words, as children follow along. Careful observation of each pupil needs to be in the offing. In the second read aloud, pupils join in on the oral reading activity. This may be repeated several times so that each pupil has learned the sight words in context. A pupil should then be able to read, independently these same pages in a beginning programme of reading instruction. Such learning might transfer to other kinds of materials read. The Big Book approach integrates content with learning words by sight. It is one procedure of teaching in a reading programme for young children. Vocabulary development is stressed in context. Pupils may notice structure and semantics in reading.

Disadvantages in using the Big Book procedure are the following:

- selected pupils may need more assistance in word recognition techniques
- the Big Book approach may become boring unless other methods of reading readiness instruction are used as well
- there are no accompanying teaching suggestions. The teacher determines additional suggestions for reading instruction, other than the read aloud.
- there might be a weak sequence when new big books are chosen to be read (Ediger and Rao, 2003).

Individualized Reading

A good supply of library books needs to be available for pupil choice in reading. These books need to be on a variety of genres and on diverse reading levels so that a pupil may select that which is suitable for reading. After completing the reading of a library book, the pupil needs to have a conference with the teacher to indicate the quality of word recognition skills as well as of comprehension. Thus, the child reads aloud from the completed library book so that the teacher may notice the kinds of errors made in reading, if any. Errors such as in word recognition need to be recorded by the teacher with needed assistance provided. Questions may be discussed to reveal comprehension of ideas. Notes made by the teacher pertaining to the conference with the pupil are dated, filed, and reviewed prior to the next conference.

The pupil individually chooses sequential library books to read. The teacher selects a library book for a child if he cannot settle down with reading a book.

Weaknesses of individualized reading are the following:

- a pupil may choose a limited number of genres to read
- easy to read books may be selected rather than challenging reading materials

- pupil lacks self-discipline in picking sequential books to read
- the teacher is not able to keep up with the sequential conferences if a large class of pupils is involved
- the time to teach needed skills may be lacking with a one-on-one approach in individualized reading, during conference time.
- pupils pace the speed of reading according to their own unique rate of comprehension
- pupils may choose a different book if there is no interest in the original book chosen
- selected pupils may need teacher assistance in making a choice if a pupil cannot settle down with reading a library book.
- pupils may be encouraged in reading when the teacher reads aloud a fascinating book to the entire class.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

SSR is very open-ended in methodology. In fact, there are no written methods to use. From a goodly selection of library books, the child selects one for reading. Generally, the time is very flexible as to the length of time for SSR. Fifteen minutes per school day, as a minimum, might be acceptable. Everyone in the classroom reads silently, including the teacher. Pupils are to see a role model with adults also reading a library book. There are no follow-up conferences with children after they have completed reading a library book. Sheer enjoyment of reading is being emphasized. With enjoyment of reading, pupils may be interested and motivated to do more reading. Sequential selections of library books by the individual are made in SSR. The reader owns the curriculum in an open-ended procedure of reading. There should be no interruptions while pupils are engaged in reading. Advocates claim much success for SSR:


- pupils individually may choose and read what is preferred and has appeal

Conclusion

The best reading curriculum needs to be in the offering for each student. Objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures need to be emphasized so as to assist students to achieve optimally.

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Can IT Help Students Read and Write?

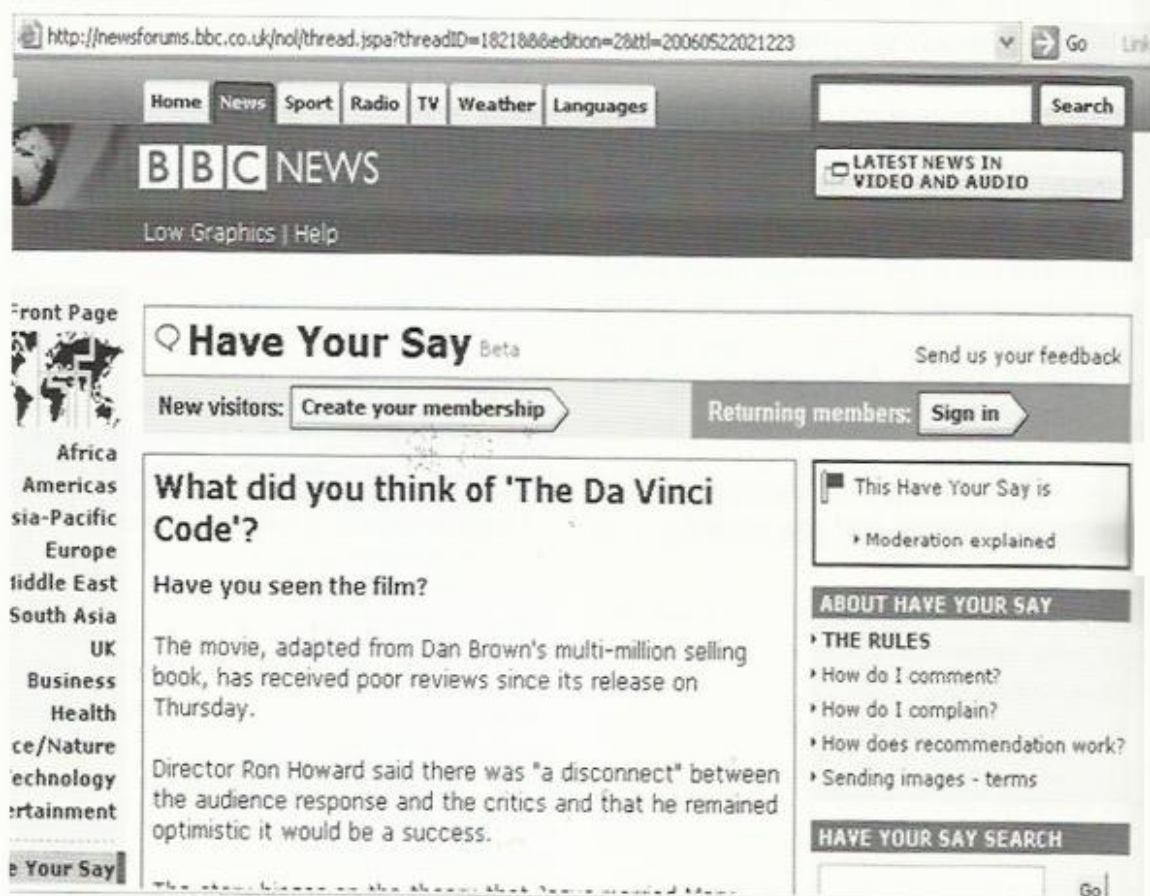
Joy Lee

After mentioning Dan Brown's multi-million bestseller and the religious controversy that the movie was stirring around the world, Mrs Tan's¹ usually apathetic Sec 4 EL class suddenly became animated with interest. With only 10 minutes of class time left, she could only allow two very vocal students argue whether 'The Da Vinci Code' was based on fact or fiction. No chance for the quieter ones to say anything though, not that they had felt any impulse to express themselves in front of the whole class. Nonetheless, she seized the opportunity to alert her class to BBC's *Have Your Say*²

online discussion forum to read critically what people around the world were saying about the movie. She also pointed out that apart from reading each comment for what was said, they needed also to infer the writer's attitudes towards the subject matter and/or other writers' comments. (See Figures 1 and 2 of screenshots of webpages)

She had earlier discovered that the site was fully moderated, hence, she did not have to be overly worried about subversive content. She pointed out to her students that they might even wish to participate in the

Fig. 1: Screenshot of BBC's Have Your Say webpage



1 Mrs Tan is not a real person but a composite of the experiences of many teachers whom I have come across, experimenting with the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools in the EL classroom

2 <http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspa?threadID=182188&edition=2&ttl=20060522021223> retrieved on 20 May 2006.

Fig 2: Screenshot of BBC's Have Your Say comments

Your Say: What did you think of 'The Da Vinci ... - Microsoft Internet Explorer

orites Tools Help

Search Favorites

forums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspa?threadID=18218&edition=2&atl=20060522021223

Added: Sunday, 21 May, 2006, 20:23 GMT 21:23 UK

I have read the book and now seen the film, however I was dubious about the latter because of all the critics reviews I have read and heard. However the film was excellent, which stayed more true to the book than I thought it would! I preferred the book but the film was NOT dissapointing, or slow or a £125 million critical disaster!!

Do not listen to the critics, but to go to the cinema with an open mind and you will be pleasantly suprised as I was!!! 10/10 - excellent!!

Catrin Killa, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom

Recommended by 2 people

Sign in to recommend comments Alert a Moderator

Added: Sunday, 21 May, 2006, 20:21 GMT 21:21 UK

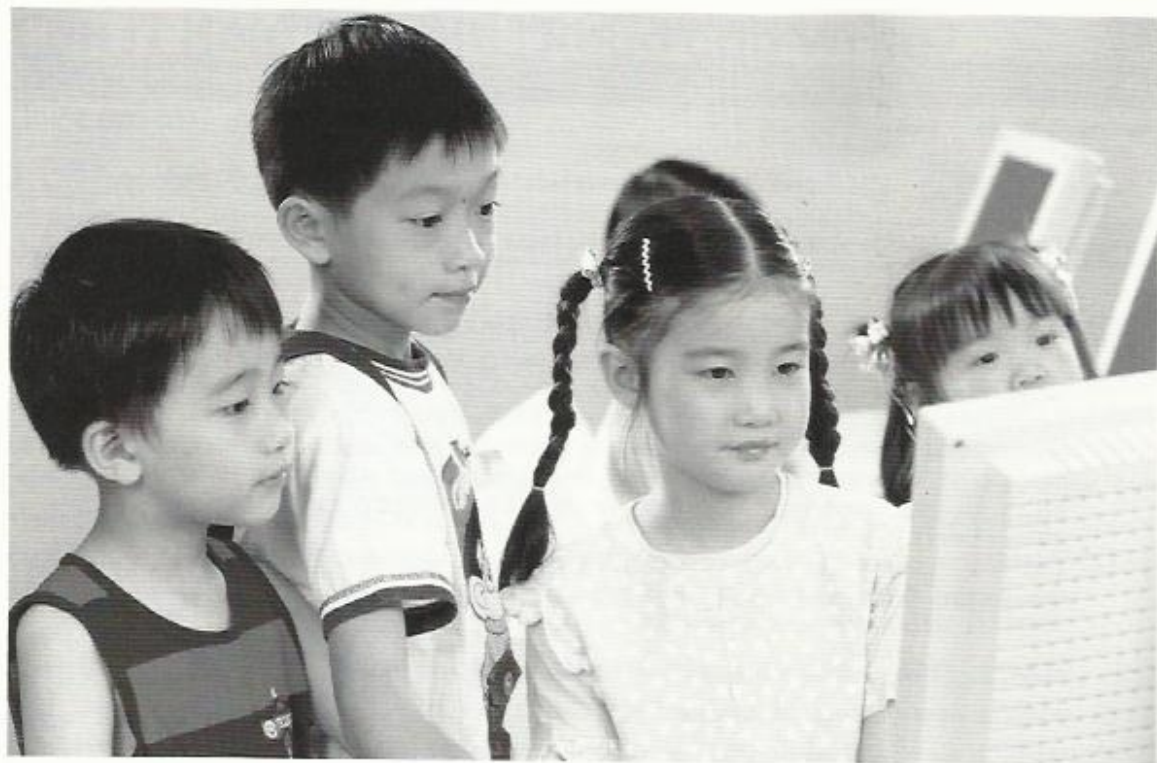
Read the book; saw the movie. The book was better. Unfortunately, many people will believe it is either true or it's possible; but it is neither.

I'm not particularly religious; but also not surprised to see an anti-Christian crowd here; it helps explain the hate for President Bush. I imagine the arrogance that makes some

discussion with people from all over the world but reminded them to post comments only after careful thinking and checking of facts as the international audience suffered no fools! No harm giving them such warnings though she was aware from Warshauer and Kern (2000) that "the fact that computer-mediated communication (CMC) occurs in a written, electronically archived form gives students additional opportunities to plan their discourse and to notice and reflect on language use in the messages they compose and read". As online discussions are asynchronous in nature, unlike online chats which are real-time, and often result in unthinking, frivolous talk, the provision of time to 'notice and reflect on language use' in the discussions in its 'archived form' is especially important for students to study models of written language such as the discourse in authentic argumentative writing.

She was also hoping that with this resource, some of her very shy students might even find their voices recalling that Warshauer, Turbee and Roberts (1994) had conducted research that showed many positive effects of CMC on group dynamics especially in encouraging shy foreign language students to become more communicative in online discussions, who then became less diffident in face-to-face discussions. Such students were also cited to have made more useful comments on work written by their peers and who subsequently became better writers. However, she was also well aware of some disadvantages highlighted by Robinson (1993) like the loss of paralinguistic cues, like tone of voice, in face-to-face discussions. This, she felt, was inconsequential in view of her focus on their argumentative skills in written form.

Knowing that her students had a real audience, and an international one at that,



Mrs Tan realised how her students might get motivated to have their say in cyberspace. They would learn sooner than later that they had to make the effort to communicate clearly, sensibly and diplomatically. And she realised that such learning opportunities were hard to come by from traditional classroom contexts. In class, students frequently 'got away' with fatuous remarks which were easily forgotten in face-to-face discussions but in an online forum, it would not be easy to retract one's unthinking and callous comments. She shuddered, recalling the few young people who were charged with making racist comments in their blogs. Somehow she felt a deepened conviction that as a teacher, she did not wish for her students to leave school being ignorant of the new communication rules especially when communication was increasingly conducted online.

When she had more time she hoped to conduct such online discussions, possibly combining her 3 classes and making use of the archivable discussion threads for assessment purposes. She would provide the assessment rubrics and rate them on such things as the quality of their participation (the number of postings or

comments made; how cooperative and self-directed they were in getting the discussion 'flowing', etc.) or the quality of their arguments (how well they supported their assertions; how objective they remained, etc.) The students themselves could also practise peer evaluation to rate each other using the same rubrics. This would save her class time for other face-to-face activities such as small-group remedial work. Furthermore, if she could get her teacher friend from another school to collaborate with her, they could have their respective students discussing common topics and even having debates.

Could Mrs Tan have achieved some of the above learning benefits without the online communication tool? In other words, what are the 'value adds' of IT use in developing reading and writing skills using online discussions? For a start, every student can participate, which is something that is not achievable in a face-to-face classroom setting with time being the chief constraint. This means that there will be an increase in the quantity of their online reading and writing experiences. Secondly, the communication context and audience are also authentic, not contrived by and for the teacher alone. This makes the

communication richer and more meaningful. Thirdly, the time that students can take in crafting their comments before submission also trains them to be more reflective about the effect of what they write online. Fourthly,

shy students can benefit from the safety afforded by this communication mode, while rude or 'bullying' students can be cautioned if the teacher opts to check all students' postings before they are published.

Table 1: List of some IT tools & resources for reading & writing

Specific reading/ writing focus	IT tools/ resources	Value add of IT	Student-centred engaged learning				
			P	E	T	A	L
Purposeful reading	<i>WebQuests</i> ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry-based learning framework using teacher-selected Internet resources • Assessment rubrics provides self-directedness in learning • Collaboration outside class time & space 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Textual analysis, semantic mapping	Electronic graphic organisers e.g. <i>Inspiration</i> ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic, interactive visual learning tool • Assessment of misconceptions 	✓			✓	
Vocabulary-building	Concordances, online dictionaries & thesauri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic & rich word databases • Comparison of different online dictionaries & thesauri 	✓				✓
Comprehension-type exercises e.g. cloze passages	<i>Toolbook, Hot Potatoes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorable (by teacher) self-access, self-paced interactive exercises with immediate feedback • Strong for assessment for learning 	✓			✓	
Access to news & current issues	Electronic news e.g. BBC online ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich reading resources with opportunities for online discussions on reading materials to deepen meaning-making 	✓				✓
Online writing	Computer-mediated communication tools e.g. email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic writing medium • Learning new communication tools & unique rules of use 	✓				✓
Pre-writing Planning	Visual learning tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise ideas generated in graphic form (for more visual learners) 	✓	✓			

3 <http://webquest.org/>

4 <http://www.inspiration.com/>

5 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

This form of discourse management would not be possible in face-to-face class discussions. Last but not least, such discussions are archived and can be used for assessment purposes, in a mode which

is a departure from the usual essay or comprehension assignments, which again are not authentic representations of language use. The strengths of the above Internet resource are also in providing additional

Table 1: List of some IT tools & resources for reading & writing – Continued

Specific reading/ writing focus	IT tools/ resources	Value add of IT	Student-centred engaged learning				
			P	E	T	A	L
Journal writing	Weblogs (or 'blogs') e.g. from http://www.blogger.com/start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing-on-the-go & having a personal blog space help motivate the journaling habit • Photos can be uploaded too to create online photo stories 	✓			✓	✓
Collaborative process writing	International Writing Exchange (IWE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-editing outside classroom (for assessment for learning) • Cross-cultural appreciation • Writing for a real audience 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peer editing	Wordprocessor (Track Change, Comment functions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By text or sound • Multiple peer editing possible • Collaborative learning 	✓			✓	✓
Peer editing (content & style)	Grading tools e.g. Focus Corrector ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment for learning of content & style in writing 				✓	✓
Peer editing (grammar)	Grammar marking tools e.g. Markin 32 ⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment for learning of grammar 				✓	✓
Summary writing	Presentation tools e.g. Powerpoint, Inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-present textual information in multimedia formats (text, audio, visual) 	✓	✓			
Creative writing	Presentation tools e.g. Powerpoint Sound recorder e.g. Microsoft Sound Recorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of multimedia effects (speech bubbles, audio, animations, graphics) to create digital stories 	✓	✓	✓		

⁶ <http://www.baggetta.com/focuscorrector.htm>

⁷ http://www.cict.co.uk/software/markin/sys_reqs.htm

reading experience of the text-type in news articles and the building of their global and general knowledge. An excellent actual example of the use of online discussion forums albeit without the BBC news content as trigger can be found in Ho, Teo and Tay (2006) detailing the experimental efforts of a Junior College teacher using IT to help her students hone their writing skills in argumentative writing.

If a teacher wishes to provide a meaningful context to encourage her students to do process writing and at the same time widen their world view, she can also make use of another Internet resource called International Writing Exchange (IWE). Using this, her students will collaborate with students from other countries to write on a wide range of expository essay topics. The website <http://www.writeit.to/sys/> gives a good idea of how IWE works. A comprehensive discussion of IWE is found in Towndrow and Vallance (2004). For local news resources, the subscription-based 'News in Class' programme by Channel News Asia is an example (found in <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/nic>) although the cost and value of the given news-based language-learning activities should be carefully considered.


It is hoped that the above paragraphs have presented a convincing case of how some IT tools and resources can add value to the development of reading and writing skills. This does imply that teachers have to be discerning in selecting the appropriate tool or resource from among the range of available resources, digital or non-digital to help meet a target language outcome. What follows is a brief survey of some useful IT tools and resources in Table 1 to show the wide range of possibilities to support reading and writing pedagogies, mainly at the secondary level. It is to be noted that many of the IT tools and resources are based on courses offered by MOE's Educational Technology Division. Details are available online at http://www.moe.gov.sg/edumall/pro_develop/workshops.htm.

Using MOE's Curriculum Planning and Development Division's PETALS framework for engaged learning, we can see how every of the five elements: Use of (P)edagogies, Learning (E)xperiences, (T)one of learning, (A)ssessment and (L)earning content are well-served through learning activities such as the one discussed above. How well these tools and resources match the PETALS framework will also be indicated.

In 2003, the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) presented compelling research findings of the benefits of IT for the teaching and learning of English in UK schools. To harness such benefits, however, all teachers, including those in ESL contexts in Singapore, will do well to consider the many factors and conditions pointed out, particularly in increasing their own understanding of literacy and to rethink what it means to read and write in the 21st century.

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READ!@Concord

Seow Hong Kiang



This initiative is part of the school's overall reading programme aimed at encouraging all our staff and pupils to read for purposeful learning.

- ❖ enjoy language learning and
- ❖ value and appreciate their study of English/MT language.

The reading club concept is founded on the belief that reading:

- is a gateway to a whole new world of information, insights and ideas
- can help readers increase in wisdom when they reflect upon their experiences while reading
- will help the staff grow in their profession by reading and learning with a community of fellow teachers
- enables students to:
 - ❖ improve on the range of language they will use
 - ❖ improve on the associated skill of writing

Milestones

READ!@Concord started with the launch of the Senior Management Committee (SMC) Book Club, with twenty members on 30th August 2005. A Reading Facilitation Workshop was conducted by a trainer and the 1st reading facilitation session on the book "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time" was initiated. To date, the SMC members have facilitated five such book reading and discussion sessions.

On 17 May 2006, the Staff Book Clubs were launched. A Reading Facilitators' Workshop was conducted by a group of Concord teachers to the whole staff to equip them with the skills to organise book clubs and conduct book facilitation sessions. All staff members were issued books for subsequent

book facilitation sessions. Nine teachers' book clubs were formed. There were six groups formed for English Language, two groups for Chinese Language and one group for Malay Language. To date, two book facilitations have been conducted. A book discussion facilitation session was also been conducted for our office and administrative staff.

Partnership with National Library Board (NLB)

This programme was made possible with the close collaboration and support from the National Library Board (NLB). The school was able to tap on their expertise and book resources. NLB sponsored some Concord Primary staff in the Reading Facilitators' Workshop conducted in March 2006 in conjunction with the nation wide initiative, READ!Singapore 2006. The school was able to arrange for bulk loans of all the book resources to our SMC and Staff Book Clubs.

The Staff Book Clubs' readings were taken from the READ!Singapore 2006 resource materials. READ!Singapore is an annual nation-wide reading initiative launched by NLB since 2005 to promote a culture of reading among Singaporeans.

Teachers' Reflections

Reflections form an integral part of our book reading experiences. The staff are encouraged to pen their thoughts for sharing with each other. The following are some examples:

"It was a really fun yet fruitful session! Teachers were deeply engaged during the discussions & many were able to relate to some of the characters/ events. Through this, we actually learn



more about each other and this has brought us closer as we understand each other more. We had great fun flying the kites ...brought back a lot of memories during our kampung days!!! Looking forward to the next book facilitation."

*Facilitator of Pri 1 Teachers' Book Club
at Book Facilitation session for "The
Kite Runner" on 4th Oct 06*

I felt apprehensive at the beginning because unlike the first book which we had, I did not really enjoy this particular book. However, I did look forward to the session because it is an opportunity for us to simply sit down and take a break and share our opinions not only about the book but also it was heartwarming that the teachers were willing to share on their life experiences in some point in time during the discussion.

*Facilitator of P4 Book Club at Book
Facilitation session for "Looking in,
looking out" on 4 Oct 06*





I think that this session is very enriching. We could share our thoughts and opinions not only about the book but also about own lives and experiences. About the book: I like the setting of this book because the setting is the place where I used to live when I was young. I could relate to the language used and the way of living among the Boyanese. It brought back memories of the good old days where people, young & old, will bathe together in the same big bath room...

Member of ML Book Club at Book facilitation session for "Jeda-Sabri Buang" on 16 Aug 06

Pupils' Book Clubs

Reading is a fundamental skill upon which formal education is constructed. We believe in the need to lay a strong foundation for our pupils. As the adult book clubs were formed, efforts were also put into encouraging the formation of pupils' book clubs.

On 15 Feb 06, a KidsREAD Book Club was set up for a group of twenty-five needy Primary 2 students. This provided an excellent opportunity for us to give extra support to these pupils to acquire reading

skills and cultivate a love for reading. In May 2006, two Librarian Book Clubs, namely a CL Book Club and an EL Book Club were set up. We hope that these would be the start of more pupils' reading circles soon to be formed in our school.

Our school is committed to a school-wide implementation of the programme. We hope to realize the vision we set forth for this reading initiative, that is,

1. To create a community of readers among staff and students in Concord who enjoy reading and sharing of ideas with each other.
2. To create a community of "Leading Learners" (*Learning by Heart*, p.28) among a teaching staff who enjoys reading and who will pass on the passion of reading to its pupils.

Reference

Ronald S. Barth, *Learning By Heart*, Jossey-Bass, San Fransico, 2001.

Mdm Seow Hong Kiang is the Vice-Principal of Concord Primary School and she firmly believes that any attempt to foster a reading culture in the school must begin with the pupils seeing the teachers read, and then talk and share about reading." She can be contacted at Concord Primary School Tel: 6763 2139 Ext 14 or E-mail: Seow_Hong_Kiang@moe.gov.sg

The BPian Experience...

Hoe Tou Hwa

We're very proud to say that Literature is a MUST for all our students at Bukit Panjang Government High School, and this has proven to be the right way to developing a sensitivity for the Arts and a love for the power of words. In addition, we believe language skills such as the Oral skills, the Reading skills, the Listening skills and the Writing skills are just as important and can be enhanced through the subject. This has resulted in BPians doing well in the English Language and Literature, not just in terms of the examination results but also in developing skills that will help them to express themselves well in whatever field they eventually go into.

The Problem

Since time immemorial, Literature was a compulsory subject in our school and our English distinctions for the GCE 'O' Level Examinations were on the rise, so much so that our chart on the wall of one of our

school buildings became well known. This, however, took a turn when one principal decided against it in the late 1990s. Thereafter our English Language results dropped to a never-before low of 26.2%.

This downward trend in the number of quality passes in the GCE 'O' Level English Language Paper was a cause for concern. It was prevalent despite the fact that lots of enrichment activities (both internal and external) had been conducted for the graduating classes. Most of the students (even the most able ones) were only attaining a Grade B (otherwise known as the 'B' syndrome) in the national examination.

In addition, many students seemed to lack confidence in the spoken English and they were not forthcoming in participating in speech competitions or even to speak up during public speaking sessions. The school also had problems getting volunteers to be suitable Masters-of-Ceremony.



To make matters worse, the profile of our students is such that only 27.7% speak English at home as compared to 67.2% of the students in pre-selected schools (in the School Pic) who speak English. In addition, these students of this digital era just do not read and do not like to read. Sigh, this is indeed a perennial problem faced by many schools.

A Solution.....

It was then that the school decided the following should be implemented to help it turn around and these came in gradually over a few years:

- (a) Literature was once again made compulsory for all levels
- (b) the Speech Communication Arts Service Course to help students secure that distinction in the Oral component; this was introduced in 2000
- (c) Dramatization to be introduced to all Secondary One students; this was officially implemented in 2004
- (d) more opportunities for students to practise using proper English

Need to train students to be confident & eloquent.....

The first batch of students involved in this Speech Communication Arts Service course were the Secondary Fours and Normal Fives who underwent training to build skills of voice, speech, expressive speaking and presentation; they were also trained in preparation for the internal Oral examination in April and the external Oral examination in August. The Secondary Three students were also involved, but their lessons included the listening, speaking and reading skills covered in their usual English Language lessons using the SOW (Schemes of Work)

For the first year, a specialist was engaged to train both the teachers and co-train the

Upper Secondary students with their English Language teachers. In subsequent years, the teachers took over the planning and the conduct of lessons. This time round, the programme was implemented in the Lower Secondary level too.

This second batch of students in the Lower Secondary signed up for enrichment classes like Voice Projection, Presentation Skills, emcee Training and PESA (Plain English Speaking Award) training by our very own English Language teachers.

Start them young.....

In 2004, it was then felt that the Lower Secondary Literature programme should be revamped to make it more interesting and meaningful so that more students would opt to study Full Literature at Secondary Three instead of Elective Literature.

The idea of introducing compulsory dramatization was first mooted in 2004 and conducted by our Literature teachers. But in the second year, it was felt that we needed some expertise in this field for both the teachers and the students. The classes were then divided into groups and each half of the class was given a teacher; thus the collaboration with a theatrical group in 2005.

Under this programme, all Secondary One students have to undergo a six-week Drama course with a professional drama theatrical company at the end of which they have to produce a skit of about ten minutes. This assessment is carried out by their Literature teachers after curriculum time when this first started and gradually during curriculum time when it was incorporated into the timetabling. With the implementation of this form of assessment, the usual written examination for the subject was replaced and it forms 25% of the total assessment of a student's Literature mark.

At the end of the six-week course, practically all the Secondary Ones are able to excel in this dramatization. They are able to write a script and stage a short dramatized

piece because curriculum is given to them to write the script under their Literature teacher's supervisor before they start rehearsing the skit during curriculum time too. The teaching of the basic skills of dramatizing a short script is carried out by instructors from a theatrical group and it is done outside curriculum time.

Building on the foundation.....

In the following year when these students get to Secondary Two, the drama component is put into the Continual Assessment in Semester One and this is monitored by their Literature teachers who will set a task based on drama. This dramatization of an excerpt will form 15% of the total mark at the end of the semester.

During the Streaming Option at the end of the year, all Secondary Two students have to choose between Full Literature or Elective Literature which is tied to Social Studies as Combined Humanities (SS, LE). This is the way we have made Literature a compulsory subject for all students in the Upper Secondary.

We have made Literature compulsory because we strongly believe in its numerous benefits: it enhances the learning of the English Language; it helps inculcate a reading habit which can be sustained into adulthood; it explores areas of human concern, thus leading to a greater understanding of self & other; it prepares students for the General paper in the junior college.

Providing opportunities.....

The next stage was forming a platform to give students a chance to put into practice what they have learnt and these include:

- Best three Secondary One skits will be in the Finals as part of Post Examination activities
- Public Speaking session for the whole level in the School Hall (once in a term)

- Public Speaking in class (a prepared speech in Semester One & an impromptu speech in Semester Two)
- USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) during READ periods
- English Writing incorporated into curriculum time on Fridays
- Public Performance for those students interested in the performing arts
- publicity of various English Language competitions (both intra school and inter-school)

The Impact.....

In the year when the Speech Communication Arts Service course was conducted, there was a considerable improvement in the Internal Oral Examination results, and the examiners were more than happy to award Band One marks. The English teachers were also very impressed with the students' level of confidence, in particular, during the Conversation segment of the examination. Similarly, during the GCE 'O' Level Oral Examination, the Oral examiners (from other schools) made an observation to the SOE (Supervisor of the Oral Examination) that our students were more confident compared to previous years. Indeed, that year's GCE 'O' Level results showed a good improvement: the percentage of distinctions increased by about 10%; none of the local students failed; the MSG (Mean Subject Grade) improved from 3.53 to 3.15. This improvement helped the school to improve its overall MSG.

In general, the students have been more forthcoming in their participation in the various Inter-school competitions or activities. In the year the programme was implemented, one student in Secondary Four emerged the Champion in the Cluster Inter-school PESA Competition that year. Fourteen volunteers signed up to read their folktales over the air on Passion Radio. Here, four students were selected to read

Bukit Panjang Government High School
presents

Beauty and the Beast

Beauty lies not in what one can see, but what lies beneath.



Date: 19th July 2006 , Wednesday

Time: 8 pm

Venue: Victoria Theatre

For booking and enquiries, please call: Tel: 67691031, Fax: 67626576
Bukit Panjang Government High School, 7 Choa Chu Kang Ave. 4, Singapore 689609
or visit our website: www.bpgghs.moe.edu.sg

one of the participants' story which was aired over Christmas. In addition, the debators did well in the inter-school debates by emerging fourth and clinching the 4th and 13th placing in the Best Speaker category. Then, later in

that year, during an assembly programme hosted by MediaWorks artiste Irin Gan, the Upper Secondary students were very confident and very keen in asking questions and taking part in role-play.



In addition, volunteers were forthcoming when student emcees were needed for the weekly Public Speaking sessions and these students performed well under the supervision of the specialists. There was also a ready pool of student emcees for the various school events or functions. Teachers had observed that classroom participation had become more lively. In fact, students requested for methodology which was more participatory in nature. As a result lessons were and still are more student-centred.

With this structure in place, it was not a problem getting students to sign up for auditions for parts in the various public performances the school produced. Some of these were 'Ramayana' in 2004, 'Mu Gui Ying' in 2005 and 'Beauty & the Beast' in 2006.

Keeping it going.....


Grades is not everything; providing our students with life skills is more important and this means going beyond the curriculum. We see the need to help our students develop language skills that will help them to express themselves well in

whatever field they eventually go into. Our constant assessment and review of our policies led us to implement programmes like the 'News-in-Class' lessons and Travel Documentaries to encourage students to read widely and keep abreast with current affairs both in Singapore and the world.

What are the X-factors ?

In conclusion, our success so far can be attributed to

- our very supportive principals (past & present)
- a very co-operative School Management Committee
- very dedicated teachers with a strong passion for Literature & English Language
- motivated students.

 **Mrs Hoe Tou Hwa** is HOD/EL & Literature of Bukit Panjang Govt High School.

Writing and Editing for the Web

Klea Scharberg

On March 16, the **Association of Educational Publishers (AEP)** and Stanford Publishing Courses for Professionals co-sponsored a one-hour virtual seminar on **"Writing and Editing for the Web."** These are Klea Scharberg's notes from the presentation.

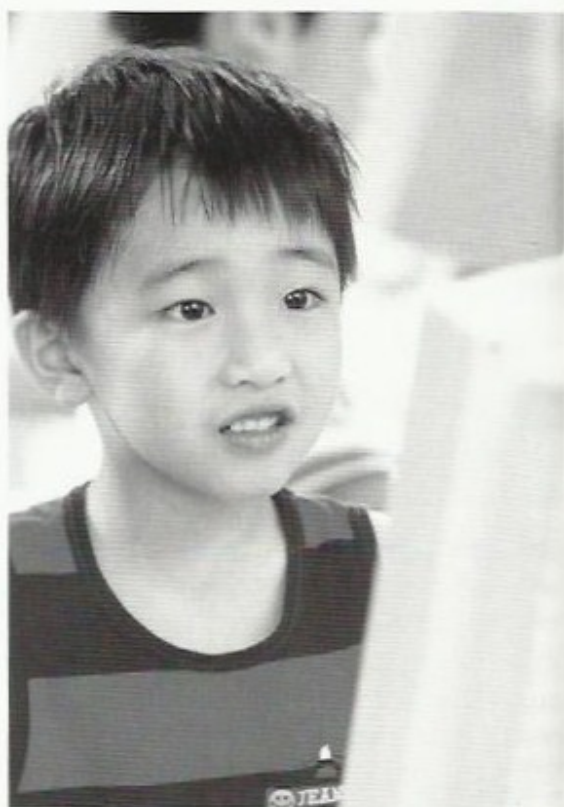
Seminar Presenter: Susan West, West Gold Editorial

Topics covered:

- Stop Thinking Like Print
- Make Text Scannable
- Use the Power of the Web
- Make Links and Other Display Copy as Informative and Inviting as Possible

Stop Thinking Like Print

- Most Web sites are service-oriented for their users and members. These sites are in the business of helping the user achieve, act on, or do something.
- Choose only content that belongs on the Web. Ask yourself
 - ❖ Is it timely or "need to know"?
 - ❖ Is it enhanced by interactivity?
 - ❖ Does it provide opportunities for users to act on something?
- What is timely? This depends on your audience. Will you give your users a day to act on information or a month? Once you have chosen the frequency at which you will update your content and what defines timely information, be consistent. If you update your home page once a week, the user will return weekly expecting new content. If you provide a monthly online newsletter, the user will return monthly to read it.
- Think in layers of information. A new way of organizing content, layers offer introduction points to different topics within an area or piece of information. A user typically spends 10 seconds scanning a Web page looking for the content they need, so offer the user immediate results. A good example is Amazon.com, which offers multiple types of information via layers for each product. Amazon offers the user the opportunity to both perform actions and learn more about specific information related to products.
- Abolish the affectations of print publishing. Your Web publication should not look exactly like the print version, or vice versa. You can repurpose the print version for the Web — after asking the three questions from above — and reorganize the information in layers to



optimize Web usability. Slow narrative leads, volume and issue numbers, ISSN numbers, indices, and appendices are not Web-friendly pieces of content or organization.

- The Web should offer something that isn't practical in a print publication. Employ the interconnectivity of the Web to your advantage by adding links from your content to resources and action opportunities.

Make Content Scannable – 80 percent of Web Users Scan Pages Instead of Reading Them

- Make it short. Web content is intended to be read and digested quickly. Avoid slow narrative leads and unnecessary text. Achieve your objective as succinctly as possible.
- Put the bottom line at the top; possibly in a larger font than the rest of your text. By providing a succinct summary of the information immediately, you can aid the user in making the decision to stay and read further.
- Make it bite-sized by organizing the content in small sections using subheads. This organization communicates the outline of the content at-a-glance and allows users to digest the information quickly.
- Use formatting like bolding or italicizing important words to highlight keywords and key concepts so that the text jumps off of the page. Avoid underlining text on the Web. Underlined text indicates a link, and users will try to click on it.
- Create bulleted or numbered lists to organize content and provide a visual change for the user. Research suggests that users can only absorb so much information at one time; limit lists to 9 items or less. Numbered lists tell the user that there is more content further down the page.

- Focus on what users need to know, not what is nice for them to know. Make the payoff conspicuous. Push buttons to engage the user in the content. Make it a short trip to the action by offering immediate options. Give a result.

- Write informally and simply. Use short paragraphs.

- Use language that is specific, concrete, and active. Avoid passive voice and compound sentences. Give your user a direction. Don't provide suggestions; give answers.

- Use parallel construction for like content pieces and keep it consistent.

Use the Power of the Web

- Provide document navigation. Examples include providing targeted links that go to specific information (like an FAQ) and breadcrumbs that allow the user to return to previous content.

- Link liberally and correctly. Links are another form of formatting and highlighting keywords and key content. Avoid linking the words "here," "click," and "go." Look at the content as a whole when you have finished linking. Is it overwhelming? Avoid linking an entire sentence or phrase when one word will convey the action.

- Optimize your content for search engines. The more effectively written and organized your content is, the more accessible it is by search engines like Google. Add meta-data to your content for the best results.

- Add interactive functions like
 - ❖ Option to e-mail to a friend
 - ❖ Printer-friendly version
 - ❖ Link to author's bio, other articles by author
 - ❖ Links to source publications and related information both on and off your site

- ❖ Option to submit a question, review, comment, etc.
- ❖ Option to add site to user's favorites
- ❖ Links to retailers
- ❖ Update notification sign-up


Make Links and Other Display Copy as Effective as Possible

- Be clear — resist the urge to be clever. Just like when writing e-mails, don't depend on the reader to read the same nuance or humor into the context.
- Think like the user, speak like the user. Use the language of the user and avoid organizational lingo and jargon. Provide definitions. If your audience will understand the jargon, provide a bottom line statement written simply and without the jargon.
- For links, give clear "departure information." Let the user know if they are opening a document or PDF file or if they are about to leave your site.
- Be consistent — make sure the link wording matches the destination wording. Use the same heading and style in similar situations.
- Make this an editor's task. Sometimes the author of the content is too closely connected to the material. Enlist an

editor or second party familiar with both the content and Web usability principles to look at content and organization before it is published to the Web.

- Provide images (photos, logos, and graphics) that are germane to the content and convey information to the user. Optimize image size and resolution to lower load times for users with slower connection speeds.
- Video and audio clips enhance content. Make sure the clips are germane to the content and convey information to the user. Determine if your audience will need specialized software or programs to view or listen to the clips. Optimize clip bandwidth for users with slower connection speeds.
- Appearance Tips
 - ❖ San serif fonts like Arial or Verdana are better for the Web
 - ❖ Avoid the colour blue for emphasizing text or headlines—blue traditionally indicates a link
 - ❖ Avoid font colours like yellow and green that don't show well on a computer monitor
 - ❖ Be consistent with font sizes, colour, and formatting, i.e., headlines should be the same colour and size throughout your site
 - ❖ Avoid underlining text as it traditionally indicates a link
 - ❖ Horizontal lines are helpful in separating text and are visually calming for the user
 - ❖ Utilize the vertical space on your Web pages, especially the area visible before you need to scroll down or right



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Who's Afraid of the Big "Bad Answer"?

To get students to think for themselves as they read, teachers have to stop thinking for them.

Maren Aukerman



In principle, we know that we should value what students say. But what if a student completely misinterprets the story he or she is reading? A 5th grader I'll call Adam provides a case in point. Adam, who received special education services, was part of a pullout summer school literature discussion group serving seven struggling readers. I observed this group while visiting Adam's school one summer as part of a professional development team supporting teachers who worked with struggling middle-grade readers. An experienced classroom teacher I'll call Max was facilitating this particular literature discussion group. During one discussion, Adam was reading a fable that opens with the sentence, "A miller and his son set off to market to sell their donkey, leading the beast behind them." Hearing the word *beast*, Adam hypothesized, "The donkey may be very mean, so they don't want to ride him."

Because nothing else in the story suggests that this donkey was mean, many teachers would correct Adam by offering a definition of the word *beast* that made more sense, such as a beast of burden. Even if they did not directly say he was wrong, they would evaluate his response in such a way that he would know it was wrong.

But Adam's teacher, Max, did not step in to correct Adam. What I observed in the discussion shows how students can find their way to text-based critical thinking when an astute teacher resists yanking away "wrong" interpretations.

In Adam's case, because the teacher did not step in, one of the other 5th graders responded directly:

THOMAS: *Beast* can mean a lot of things. It can mean, like what Adam is thinking, big and mean and stuff, but *beast* can also just mean that he's big . . .

ADAM: I know, but they're selling him: "Leading the beast behind them."

THOMAS: Yeah, maybe they need the money.

Thomas called Adam's idea into question, but his words did not have the effect of a teacher's words; Adam did not feel as though he had to change his mind. Instead, he took what Thomas said as an invitation to prove his point, pointing out that the (presumably mean) donkey-

"The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon."

—Robert Cormier

beast was being sold. He continued with this line of reasoning for several more conversational turns, unswayed by Thomas's counterarguments.

To the casual observer, Thomas looks like the more sophisticated reader, because he knew several meanings of *beast* and could identify the one seemingly most connected to the story. But notice that Thomas did not back up his belief with textual evidence, whereas Adam did. I argue that Adam was publicly displaying more sophisticated reasoning about what he was reading than Thomas was.

Why didn't the teacher endorse Thomas's interpretation? Perhaps because such a move almost inevitably would have undermined Adam's reasoning process and his confidence as a reader exploring the text. Adam's hypothesizing was actually in line with how scheme theory conceptualizes the process of reading comprehension. As Rumelhart (1981) explains, "Readers are said to have understood the text when they are able to find a configuration of hypotheses (schemata) which offer a coherent account for the various aspects of the text: (p. 9). Adam's guess that the donkey was being sold because of its meanness offered him a coherent account of the text, and from Adam's perspective, he was comprehending. With a teacher correction, Adam might have learned the alternate meaning of *beast*, but

he presumably would not have learned why this meaning fit the text better.

Beyond One Knower

In most classrooms, the teacher acts as the "primary knower" who already knows the answer to the questions he or she asks and knows the "real" meaning of texts under discussion. Students are "secondary knowers" whose ideas can only become legitimate in classroom conversation when the primary knower – the teacher – bestows that legitimacy (Berry, 1981). Teacher-student exchanges often follow a pattern of teacher initiation:

TEACHER: Which way did the wolf go to granny's cottage?

STUDENT: He took a shortcut through the forest.

TEACHER: That's right.
(Nassaji & Wells, 2000).

This kind of teacher question is completely different from one I might ask in ordinary conversation, where I genuinely need to know the answer. In this pattern of interaction, the student has no independent authority to evaluate the text; the focus is on matching the teacher's interpretation.

But if we believe that reading is about critical thinking, this approach to teaching

Figure 1. Reasons That Students Speak, Listen, and Read

Reasons that...	When the teacher is the primary knower	When students are possible knowers
Students speak up...	...to be validated by the teacher	...to convince others
Students listen to other students...	...there is no clear reason to listen	...to discern that credibility of alternative positions, strengthen their own case, and modify their hypotheses as necessary
Students read the text closely...	...to figure out what the text means to the teacher	...to discover (dis)confirming evidence for their own hypotheses and those of their peers

comprehension is problematic. Interpreting a text should involve making decisions about how different aspects of the text fit (or fail to fit) with the hypotheses a reader has begun to generate. If I, as primary knower, step in to inform you that you are wrong, I inadvertently short-circuit that thinking process. Even "leading" students to evidence that supports our adult understanding of a text may make them reluctant to go out on a textual limb in developing their own hypotheses.

In the discussion involving Adam and Thomas, their teacher, Max, did not act as the primary knower. Max realized that Adam's understanding was nonstandard but he still did not force his own interpretation on the class. He maintained that students have good reasons for every textual hypothesis they hold; as a result, he was not as interested in getting the students to accept his meaning of the story as he was in unpacking their reasons (and having them unpack one another's reasons) for the hypotheses they were generating. Every comment that he made was dedicated to this end.

Indeed, no one participant in that conversation acted as the primary knower. Instead, Adam and his peers acted as possible knowers. Student ideas – standard or nonstandard – fully had the floor, and students could evaluate the text and one another's ideas about the text. For example, when Max refused to either validate or dismiss what Adam had said, Thomas picked up the slack. Had Max taken sides, that opportunity would have been lost.

When Max spoke again, he did so to bring the other students in the group into the conversation, asking each child in turn "What does the word *beast* make you think of?" Five of the seven in the group leaned toward Adam's nonstandard understanding, but Max still did not step in with an authoritative definition. Instead he said, "Clearly we have more than one understanding of the word *beast*. Maybe if we read a little bit further on, it will help us clarify what the

author's understanding of *beast* is." The students needed to look to the text, not to the teacher, to resolve the disagreement. And they did.

Authentic Reasons To Probe the Text

Up to this point, both Adam and Thomas had applied some important textual strategies. Adam drew on inferential reasoning as he hypothesized that the donkey was being sold because it was mean. Thomas appeared to rely on prior knowledge to propose that *beast* could have more than one meaning, and that *big* rather than *savage* was the more logical meaning here.

But this reference to prior knowledge was not enough to convince Adam – or the others – to adopt Thomas's interpretation. Perhaps as a result, Thomas subsequently began citing textual evidence directly to support his ideas. When the miller set his son astride the donkey in the story, Thomas seized on this fact:

THOMAS: If I was the miller and I knew that the donkey was dangerous. I wouldn't put my own kid on its back, I would put me.

MAX: I'm hearing you saying that you're not necessarily comfortable with that idea, that you don't think that's what's going on.

THOMAS: No! Because I'd rather have me get hurt than my own son.

MAX: All right, well, let's hang onto that... Can everyone remember that?

Max restarted Thomas's point, suggesting that he found it noteworthy, but he did not evaluate the hypothesis. Thomas remained deeply invested in convincing the others; he spoke up several more times to argue that Adam's interpretation was textually inconsistent, while Adam continued to resist such arguments.

Later in the story, after another student read the part where a passing merchant said,

"How can the two of you ride on the poor skinny beast? You could carry him more easily than he can carry you!" (Pinkney, 2000, p. 38), Thomas clinched his argument, drawing on direct textual evidence. Adam remained unconvinced until another student – Alfredo – launched a textually consistent explanation for the sale of the donkey.

THOMAS: If it was a beast, like it was very strong, it would have been able to carry both of them no problem! But he [the merchant] just said, "You could carry him more easily than he can carry you."

MAX: OK

THOMAS: So if he was bigger and had more muscle, he would be able to carry them no problem.

ADAM: But why are they selling him?

ALFREDO: They're probably selling him because he's skinny.

ADAM: He's weak.

ALFREDO: Yeah.

ADAM: You can't ride him.

ALFREDO: And they have no use for him.

ADAM: Yeah, because you can't ride him two at a time. Because, as Thomas said, they passed a guy on horseback, and he said, "How can the two of you ride on that poor skinny beast?" And he's all skinny and stuff, so what's the use for riding a skinny and poor donkey?

THOMAS: So you're changing your idea about a beast?

ADAM: Yeah, it's not a beast.

After half an hour of intense discussion, Adam publicly relinquished his idea that the donkey was mean. When he said, "Yeah, it's not a beast," he was acknowledging that

the text was inconsistent with his previous view; this could not be a mean, beastly animal. And both boys were remarkably sanguine about the matter.

Shared Evaluation Pedagogy

This example represents one of many times I observed the students in this group wrangling with one another and with the text. Their teacher's refusal to judge their ideas as right or wrong enabled the students to share responsibility for closely evaluating their own and one another's ideas. I call this kind of teaching and learning *shared evaluation pedagogy* (Aukerman, in press). No longer simply secondary knowers, these boys became possible knowers, with new reasons for engaging with the text, as outlined in Figure 1.

But, however interested and engaged they are, will students actually become better readers through this kind of teaching? Don't they need to be corrected by the teacher and explicitly taught "better" ways of reading?

The students needed to
look to the text, not to
the teacher, to resolve
the disagreement.

That all depends on your goal in reading instruction. If your goal is to get your students to arrive at a standard interpretation of a particular text, shared evaluation pedagogy may not serve your purposes very efficiently. When students pursue their ideas and assume substantial ownership over the conversation, they might never get to a common understanding of the big points you want them to take away. But if your goal is to develop critical readers for the longer term, evidence suggests that shared evaluation pedagogy can be tremendously powerful – and that what students learn in these conversations that assume there are no wrong answers serves



them well even on tests that do require a "right" answer.

For example, I undertook a yearlong randomized study with several colleagues (McCallum, Aukerman, & Martin, 2003) at another school. We found that at this school, 5th graders in pullout discussion groups in which teachers used shared evaluation pedagogy realized an average growth rate in comprehension that was 1.5 times the growth rate of their classmates in a control-group (as measured by the Qualitative Reading Inventory-II; Leslie & Caldwell, 1995). Students in the control group received strategy-based basal instruction from their general classroom teacher instead.

Almost all the students in the treatment and control groups were English language learners who had been identified as struggling readers – precisely the sort of "low achievers" often believed to need more explicit instruction in comprehension strategies than their higher-achieving peers (Stahl, 2004). But students in the shared evaluation pedagogy group did not receive explicit strategy instruction at all. Their

growth as readers beyond that of the control group students can probably be attributed to opportunities to thoroughly explore their textual hypotheses for purposes that mattered to them.


Taking students' ideas seriously – even when those ideas seem tangential, unsupported, or incomprehensible – is at the heart of shared evaluation pedagogy. There is more to this pedagogy than a respectful, nonevaluative stance toward student ideas; it is equally important to be, quite simply, a curious teacher. This means following up on precisely those ideas that most puzzle you, engaging students with one another's ideas, and monitoring your impulse to bring things back to the ideas that you consider most significant. When you listen most closely to what at first seems "wrong" to you, you may find, to your surprise, that your reading discussions turn out right.

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Coping Behaviours of Adolescent Students in Singapore

Chan Wei Meng and Dr Lim Kam Ming

Types of coping behaviours

Coping is defined as the cognitive and affective responses used by individuals to manage stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed two types of coping behaviour: 1) problem-focused coping – finding the most effective way to solve the problem or to control the source of the stress and 2) emotion-focused coping - efforts to manage emotional responses to stress. Frydenberg and Lewis (2002) stated that these coping processes are not intrinsically good or bad. They can be considered as productive or non-productive depending on the context in which they occur.

Age effects in coping behaviours

Previous studies found conflicting effects of age as significant factors in how adolescents cope with stressful situations. The “growth hypothesis” postulates that older adolescents are more likely to use problem-focused coping mechanisms (Krishnan, 1999; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990; Stern & Zevon, 1990). However, other studies did not support the “growth hypothesis”: Older adolescents used more emotion-focused coping as compared to younger adolescents (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Spirito, Stark, Grace & Stamoulis, 1991).

Gender effects in coping behaviours

Male adolescents were more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies as compared to the females who tended to rely on emotion-focused coping processes (Brems & Johnson, 1988; Lee, Chan & Yik, 1992). However, other studies found no significant gender differences in coping

behaviour (Hamilton & Fagot, 1988; Krishnan, 1999).

Coping behaviours of foreign students in Singapore

The number of foreign students increased from 50,000 to 66,000 in the past three years (EDB News, 2005, January 19). It is expected that up to 150,000 foreign students will be studying in Singapore by 2012 (EDB News, 2005, June 28). The 33,000 students from the People's Republic of China (PRC) form the biggest group of foreign students in Singapore. The next largest group is from Malaysia, with over 8000 students (The Straits Times, 2005, December 3).

Despite the continued growth in the education industry, there appears to be a lack of local research on how these foreign students cope in Singapore.

Purpose of study

This study had 3 aims: to examine the effects of 1) age, 2) gender and 3) nationality on the types of coping behaviour used by PRC Chinese, Malaysian and Singaporean students in Singapore to solve schoolwork and interpersonal relationships problems.

Method

Participants

One hundred fifty students with ages ranging from 13 to 20 years old ($M=16.86$, $sd=1.36$) who were staying in a boarding school in Singapore voluntarily participated in the study. These students were enrolled in various secondary schools and junior colleges in Singapore. Data from 4 students,

however, were found to be incomplete and discarded. The final sample of 146 students consists of 75 male and 71 female students (51 PRC Chinese, 46 Malaysians & 49 Singaporeans).

Materials

Part 1 of the questionnaire assessed respondents' gender, age, nationality, race and educational level. Respondents also answered one question that assess if they were experiencing problems with their schoolwork or interpersonal relationships or both types of problems concurrently.

Part 2 of the questionnaire consisted of the Revised Adolescent Coping Behaviour Scale (RACBS), adapted from the Adolescent Coping Behaviour Scale (Khoo, 2002). The RACBS assesses respondents' use of problem-focused or emotion-focused coping to manage schoolwork and interpersonal relationships problems. The 26-item RACBS comprised of 6 problem-focused coping behaviour items and 6 emotion-focused coping behaviour items for schoolwork problems, and another set of 6 problem-focused items and 6 emotional-focused items for interpersonal relationship problems. In addition, there was 1 open-ended item for respondents to indicate other ways for coping with each of the 2 types of problems.

A five-point Likert scale, with "5" representing that behaviour is "used a great deal"; "4" - "used often"; "3" - "used sometimes"; "2" - "used very little"; and "1" - "never used at all" was used in the RACBS. Higher scores reflect a higher likelihood of

the respondent in using a particular coping approach.

Procedure

Students from The People's Republic of China, Malaysia and Singapore staying in a boarding school were randomly selected in equal numbers from the student name list provided by the school office. Students were assured that their responses will be kept anonymous and confidential and that their participation was strictly voluntary.

Results & Discussion

Reliability of Measures

The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the 26-item RACBS was 0.82. The Cronbach alpha and standardized item alphas of all sub-scales revealed values of above .70 (see Table 1), a standard considered to be a reliable scale (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1995).

Revised Adolescent Coping Behaviour Scale – Schoolwork

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 12 items schoolwork parameter of the RACBS using principal components extraction with varimax rotation. The analysis yielded two factors with eigenvalues exceeding unity, and the factor solution accounted for 48.47% of the total variance.

The first factor accounted for 25.52% of the variance and comprised the 6 items from the emotion-focused coping subscale (eigenvalue = 3.06). The pivotal item for the first factor was item 3 – "blame others" – is

Table 1 Reliability of RACBS

Type of Problem Coping Item	Schoolwork		Interpersonal relationship	
	Problem-focused	Emotion-focused	Problem-focused	Emotion-focused
Cronbach alpha	.74	.77	.79	.74
Standardized item alpha	.76	.79	.80	.75

symptomatic of emotion-focused coping. The second factor accounted for 22.94% of the variance and consisted of the 6 items from the problem-focused subscale (eigenvalue = 2.75). The pivotal item for factor 2 was item 8 – “think of various ways to solve the problem” – is representative of active problem-focused coping. The results show that the two factors represent empirically separate and internally consistent constructs.

Revised Adolescent Coping Behaviour Scale – Interpersonal Relationship

To examine the factor structure of the interpersonal relationship parameter of the RACBS, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 12 items using principal components extraction with varimax rotation. The analysis indicated factor loadings of a large majority of items on two major factors which accounted for 49.81% of the total variance.

The first factor accounted for 25.83% of the variance and comprised the 6 items from the problem-focused coping subscale (eigenvalue = 3.10). The pivotal item for the first factor was item 22 – “keep working at the cause of the conflict” – is representative of active problem-focused coping. The second factor accounted for 23.98% of the variance and consisted of 5 items from the emotion-focused subscale (eigenvalue = 2.88). The pivotal item for factor 2 was item 17 – “blame others” – is symptomatic of

emotion-focused coping. The third factor, item 23 on the emotion-focused subscale – “wish a magician like David Copperfield can make the problem disappear” has a strong association with wishful thinking that is also symptomatic of emotion-focused coping. This factor accounted for 8.91% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.07). These results supported the suggestion of two factors representing empirically separate and internally consistent constructs.

Types of problems experienced

Table 2 shows the percentage of concerns with schoolwork or interpersonal relationships. Overall, schoolwork was the most prevalent singular problem (43.8%). The least common problem was interpersonal relationships (6.8%). However, 21.2% of the students reported that they faced problems with both schoolwork and interpersonal relationships while 25.3% of them reported no problems. A small number, 2.7% reported they have other problems other than those related to schoolwork and interpersonal relationships.

The type of problems faced by the students was significantly related to their nationalities, $X^2(8, N = 146) = 19.52, p < .05$. The strength of the relationship was .26.

Among the three nationalities, the percentage of PRC students with only schoolwork problems (60.9%) seemed to be greater than their Malaysian (39.2%) and Singaporean

Table 2 Students' Current Concerns

Types of Problems	PRC	Malaysian	Singaporean	Overall
Schoolwork	60.9%	39.2%	32.7%	43.8%
Interpersonal relationships	10.9%	2.0%	8.2%	6.8%
Schoolwork and Interpersonal relationships	13.0%	19.6%	30.6%	21.2%
No problems	15.2%	37.3%	22.4%	25.3%
Others	0%	2.0%	6.1%	2.7%

(32.7%) peers. However, 30.6% of the Singaporean students (30.6%) reported having problems with both schoolwork and interpersonal relationships, as compared to only 19.6% of the Malaysian and 13% of the PRC students. Overall, 37.3% of the Malaysians reported no problems at all as compared to their Singaporean (22.4%) and PRC peers (15.2%).

Analysis of coping behaviours

A series of 2 x 2 x 3 (Gender x Age x Nationality) ANOVAs was conducted on types of coping behaviours for schoolwork and interpersonal problems. A median split was used to divide the sample into lower age and upper age groups. As there were no significant 2-way and 3-way interactions (maximum F -value=2.06, $p=.13$), only the main effects are discussed.

Gender effects on coping behaviours

There were no significant main effects of gender on both types of coping behaviours for both schoolwork and interpersonal problems (maximum F -value=1.62, $p=.69$).

These results are consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Hamilton & Fagot, 1988; Krishnan, 1999) which found no significant gender differences in their choice of an emotion-focused or problem-focused coping strategy when dealing with daily stressors.

Age effects on coping behaviours

There were no significant main effects of age on both types of coping behaviours for both schoolwork and interpersonal problems (maximum F -value=3.85, $p=.052$). This study did not support the "growth hypothesis" that states that older adolescents are more likely to use problem-focused coping (Krishnan, 1999; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990; Stern & Zevon, 1990).

Nationality effects on problem-focused coping

The main effects of nationality on problem-focused coping for both schoolwork and interpersonal problems were not significant (maximum F -value=.97, $p=.38$).

Nationality effects on emotion-focused coping

Significant main effects of nationality in the emotion-focused coping behaviours of adolescents for both schoolwork and interpersonal problems were found. Singaporeans and Malaysians were equally likely to employ an emotion-focused coping approach to solve schoolwork problems. In contrast, the PRC Chinese ($M=1.66$, $SD=.56$) were less likely to use an emotion-focused coping approach to solve schoolwork problems as compared to both their Singaporean ($M=2.19$, $SD=.79$) and Malaysian ($M=2.03$, $SD=.63$) peers, $F(2,134) = 7.22$, $p<.05$.

For interpersonal relationship concerns, Singaporeans ($M=1.98$, $SD=.74$) were more likely than their PRC counterparts ($M=1.58$, $SD=.53$) to adopt an emotion-focused coping behaviour, $F(2,134) = 5.05$, $p<.05$.

Consistency of coping approach

Problem-focused coping approach for solving schoolwork problems was significantly correlated with problem-focused coping approach for solving interpersonal problems ($r = .71$, $p<.01$). Emotion-focused coping approach for solving academic problems was also significantly correlated with emotion-focused coping approach for solving interpersonal problems ($r = .66$, $p<.01$).

These results suggest that the adolescents who tended to use a problem-focused approach in dealing with schoolwork concerns are also highly likely to use the same approach to handle interpersonal problems. Likewise, adolescents who prefer emotion-focused coping would probably use the same coping method for schoolwork and interpersonal relationship problems.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This study found that the PRC Chinese students were the least likely to use emotion-focused coping processes when


dealing with schoolwork and interpersonal relationship problems. The Singaporeans and Malaysians were both equally likely to use an emotion-focused coping mode in the face of academic difficulties with the Singaporeans being the most likely among the three nationalities to adopt emotion-focused approach when faced with interpersonal relationship problems.

Unlike other limited number of studies that examined coping behaviours between groups of a larger cultural distance such as that of Westerners versus Asians, this study compared sub-groups within the larger collective group of Asians comprising adolescents from the People's Republic of China, Malaysia and Singapore. Even with a seemingly culturally similar Asian group of adolescents, there are significant differences in the use of emotion-focused coping approaches between these 3 sub-groups when dealing with both academic and interpersonal difficulties. The differences among these culturally similar groups suggest the need for customized school programmes in order to more effectively cater to the needs of different groups of adolescents.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the results of this study are based on only a limited sample of adolescent students from 3 countries. It may, therefore, be useful to include other nationalities for future research studies. Another suggestion for future research arises from a limitation of the current study, which is its sole dependence on a paper and pencil, self-report instrument for data collection. To better validate the data of future studies, information could be collected and triangulated from other sources such as peers, family members, parents and teachers.

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News from NAFA – Staff Development



On 6 July this year, 22 teaching staff of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) received their postgraduate diplomas from Professor Leo Tan, Director of NIE in a graduation ceremony held at NAFA. They were the pioneer cohort of NAFA lecturers to graduate from an intensive, pilot *Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education* programme conducted by National Institute of Education (NIE).

For nine continuous months, these staff headed for the classroom twice weekly in the evenings and took on the role of diligent students, after they had exhausted themselves delivering lectures and imparting knowledge to hordes of creative youths during the daytime.

NIE had specially developed a curriculum to cater for the specific needs of NAFA lecturers due to the abstract nature of the arts. As such, as the course provider, NIE had to pre-empt the possible problems in teaching artistic subjects and design unique methods or approaches to resolve them. Upon the completion of seven core modules and one elective which covered the various facets of higher education in the arts, such as *"Nurturing Creativity in the Classroom"*, *"Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving & Reflection"*, *"The Role of IT in Art"*, the lecturer-graduates are now more attuned to teaching philosophies, pedagogy and current academic practices.

NAFA President, Mr Choo Thiam Siew said, "Most of our lecturers already possess the necessary expertise in their specialised fields, but they could become better

teachers by undergoing a more systematic and professional training to sharpen their pedagogic skills. NIE is therefore the logical partner we seek to bridge this competency gap for our lecturers."

Graduate representative and NAFA Music lecturer, Dr Rebecca Kan felt the sacrifice of personal hours for the intensive training had all been worthwhile. She remarked, "...Having successfully completed 242 hours of training... we have become keenly aware of current teaching practices in the Singapore context, we know how to explain what we do; and teach with more reason and understanding."

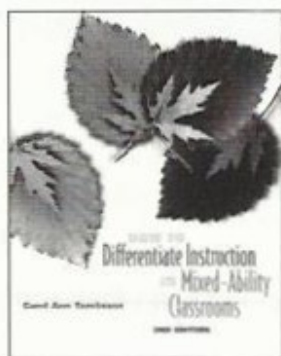
Dr Kan added, "...What started as NAFA's People's Developer initiative had opened up a whole spectrum of possibilities in which NAFA can potentially function to shape the future of arts education and research in Singapore. This would also elevate the standing of NAFA as an excellent provider of education in the arts."

NAFA is delighted to have partnered NIE in running this programme. The latter has long been involved in the training and development of education administrators and professional educators. Its in-depth understanding of the Singapore education scene enables it to offer tailor-made and relevant modules for the benefit of NAFA lecturers. To upgrade the pedagogic standards of its lecturers, NAFA aims to put all full-time, English-speaking teaching staff of the Academy through this useful programme in the next three years.

ASCD's Hot Reads for Educators

How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms, 2nd Edition

Carol Ann Tomlinson



Supply every teacher in your programme with this guide to give them proven ideas for how to match instructional approaches to the readiness, interest, and talents of all students, including:

learning centres, hands-on activities, contracts, investigative projects, and "scaffolds."

(ASCD book, 2001) 8" x 10", 117 pages
Stock #101043U93

At Work in the Differentiated Classroom

Use this video in workshops or on professional development days to introduce teachers to three critical elements of implementing differentiated instruction:

- Planning curriculum – Show teachers how to plan a differentiated unit framed around key understandings.



- Managing the classroom – Help teachers visualize how a differentiated classroom actually works and understand how to handle multiple tasks and activities.
- Teaching for Success – Explain how teachers become adept at juggling the various teaching roles in a differentiated classroom.

This is an ideal tool to demonstrate key elements of planning differentiated curriculum and instruction and illustrating key teacher roles in a differentiated classroom.

(ASCD video, 2001) Three 28- to 48-minute videotapes or one DVD, either with a Facilitator's Guide.

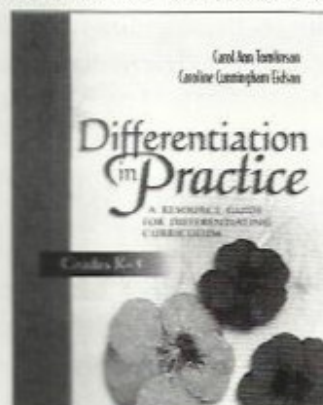
Videotape: Stock #401071U93

Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades K-5

Carol Ann Tomlinson and
Caroline Cunningham Eidson

Make sure elementary students have better access to learning by using this guide to differentiation. The guide features entire instructional units for science, social studies, math, and language arts. Each unit is complete with standards and learning outcomes, lesson plans, worksheets, learning contracts, assessment, and other materials for classroom instruction. Comments from the teachers who created these lessons help you decide differentiation strategies based on students' varied interests.

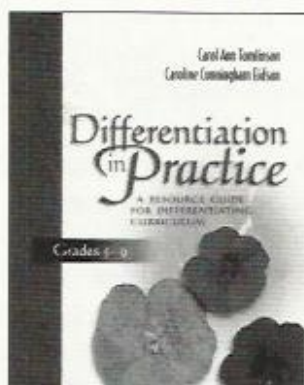
(ASCD book, 2003) 8" x 10", 198 pages
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Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 5-9

**Carol Ann Tomlinson and
Caroline Cunningham Eidson**

Go further in your implementation of differentiation with the five differentiated units of study in this book. Focused on core subjects in the middle grades — but applicable to any subject or grade level — each unit includes annotated lesson plans, worksheets, assignments, rubrics, and other tools.

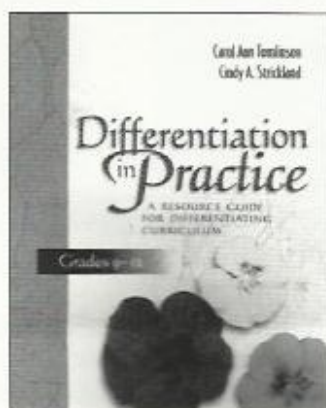


(ASCD book, 2003) 8" x 10", 247 pages
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Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 9-12

**Carol Ann Tomlinson and
Cindy A. Strickland**

When high school students have a wide range of interests, abilities, and learning styles, you can ensure all of them are learning with this collection of differentiated units for grades 9-12. All nine core-subject units include lesson plans, learning goals, and student materials that you can use as templates to create your own differentiated units.

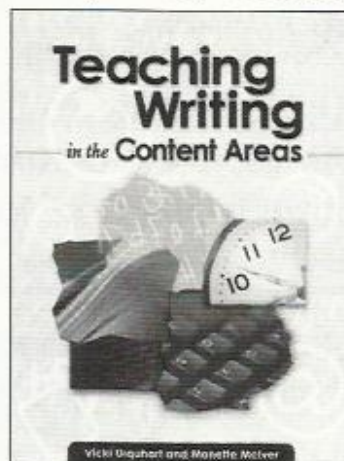


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369 pages
Stock #104140U93

Teaching Writing in the Content Areas

Vicki Urquhart and Monette McIver

Now any teacher can use writing assignments effectively in any classroom by using the strategies and practical tools in this guide. Drawing from 30 years of research, the authors explain how to create time for writing, monitoring what students are learning through their writing, and reduce the time and stress of adding writing assignments to classroom activities. A set of 35 classroom strategies guides teachers in using writing assignments to deepen students' understanding.

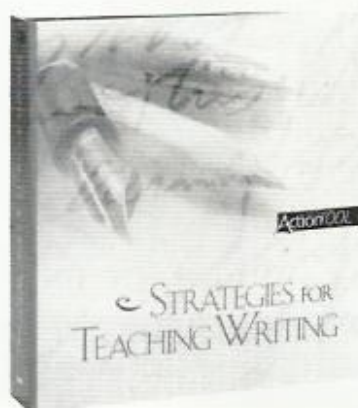


(ASCD and McRel, 2005) 8.5" x 11", 169 pages
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Strategies for Teaching Writing: An ASCD Action Tool

Roger Caswell and Brenda Mahler

Now, every teacher can be a good teacher of writing with the resources in this ASCD Action Tool. Inside the three-ring binder are research-based Writing Tools that quickly get you up to speed on effective writing strategies and provide all the materials you

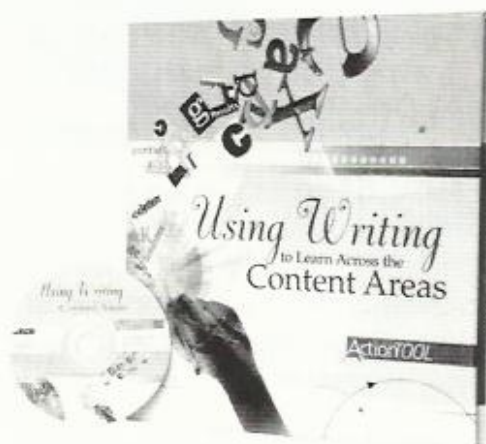


need to teach and assess the writing process. The tools include complete how-to-use instructions, teaching suggestion, classroom examples, cross-curricular activities, and assessment strategies.

(ASCD Action Tool, 2004) Three-ring binder, 396 pages
Stock #704015U78

Using Writing to Learn Across the Content Areas: An ASCD Action Tool

Sue Beers and Lou Howell



After students learn the writing process, they're ready to use writing assignments to learn content. But getting students involved in good writing assignments isn't always easy. That's where this ASCD Action Tool comes in. Use the 81 tools in this binder to give students in every grade and subject the guidance they need to organize information, synthesize their reading, and complete writing assignments. Some tools are for helping students produce writing that is informal and personal, while others require students to create longer compositions.

(ASCD Action Tool, 2005) Three-ring binder, 448 pages and a CD-ROM. Minimum System Requirements: Programme: Adobe Reader 6.0, PC: Windows 98, ME, 2000, XP, NT Service pack 3 or greater. Pentium III 300 MHz or better; Macintosh: OS9 or OSX; RAM: 16 MB, Drive: 2X CD-ROM drive, 1024 x 768 screen resolution.

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What is understanding? How do you know that students truly understand and can apply their knowledge? How can you design courses and units to emphasize understanding? In this Summer Academy, explore these questions through a series of thought-provoking exercises and design experiences:

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- Use essential questions to frame curriculum and focus on "big ideas"
- Examine a continuum of assessment methods to use in assessing the degree of student understanding
- Design or refine a unit of study using the unit Design template, and participate in a structured peer review of your unit

Institute Staff: Jay McTighe, Educational Consultant and ASCD Faculty Member, Columbia, MD, and Elizabeth Rossini, Educational Consultant, and ASCD Faculty Member, Burke, VA

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For those who want to attend the course, please register online: www.ascd.org/register

ASCD Event: Strategic Planning Retreat with Margaret Murphy Regional Director, ASCD, USA

Reported by Pauline Teng

We came together, as a council, for a full-day retreat to revisit our mission and vision. Led by Margaret Murphy, we re-examined the fundamental purpose for the existence of ASCD Singapore and brainstormed for strategies to move the organization from success to significance.

The agenda looked intimidating. The group, though small, looked set to equal the task.

Hailing from different walks of life, we pooled our diverse experiences and were able to first diverge and then converge on a way forward. The cushions into which we sank did not fail to lift us when Margaret challenged us to a higher level of thinking.

Overall, the event succeeded in gelling members and resulted in a greater clarity of direction for the association.





About ASCD SINGAPORE

ASCD Singapore is an international affiliate of The Association for supervision and Curriculum Development, USA. ASCD Singapore is committed to EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION through the promotion and sharing of effective instructional and curriculum practices.

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Singapore 319074

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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Singapore)

c/o Tele-Temps Pte Ltd 1002 Toa Payoh Industrial Park #06-1475 Singapore 319074
Tel: 6250 7700 Fax: 6257 9500 Email: ascd@work-solutions.com



MEMBERSHIP FORM

(Membership is valid 31 December 2007)

NEW APPLICATION ☐ RENEWAL ☐ UPGRADING MEMBERSHIP ☐

Please print clearly.

Name (as in NRIC): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Contact No: (Home): _____ (Handphone): _____ (Office): _____

(Fax): _____ Email: _____

Organisation/School: _____

Occupation: _____ Sex: _____ Nationality: _____

Areas of Interest (please tick all which apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated curriculum/instruction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding by Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Habits of the Mind | <input type="checkbox"/> Pedagogical Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum Design | <input type="checkbox"/> School Assessment/Appraisal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Development/Behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Needs Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____ | |

Preferred duration and event format of programme (please pick one which is highly preferred for each)

Duration: ☐ Full day ☐ Half Day ☐ 2 hours ☐ 2 Days Conference
Event Format: ☐ Short Talks ☐ Seminars ☐ Workshops ☐ Social Events with Trainers

Membership Category (membership is not transferable): (please tick against type of membership selected)

Types of Membership	Fees Payable	Please tick
ORDINARY: For those interested in supervision, curriculum & instruction	S\$30.00 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>
INSTITUTIONAL: For schools, institutions, libraries & educational organizations/societies	S\$300.00 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>
LIFE: For individuals	S\$500.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

My payment for ASCD (Singapore) membership of S\$ _____ is enclosed.

☐ **Payments by CHEQUE:** Cross & make payable to ASCD (Singapore). Cheque No.: _____

☐ **Payments by IFAAS** (no invoice will be issued): please process the payment immediately.

Ensure that either the Principal or Vice-Principal signs and rubber-stamps the application form before forwarding it to us. This will confirm that payment will be made through IFAAS.

Please post to:

The Secretariat
ASCD (Singapore)
c/o Tele-Temps Pte Ltd
1002 Toa Payoh Ind'l Park
#06-1475
Singapore 319074

Signed:

Date: _____
Rubber Stamp (if applicable) _____

For official use only

Date Rcvd: _____
Update: ☐
Card Issued: ☐
O/R No: _____
M'ship No: _____

A Call for Articles

The ASCD (Singapore) REVIEW Committee seeks original articles on teaching and learning...

Manuscripts should be between 2,000-2,500 words, typewritten (Microsoft Word document) and submitted in the form of a hard copy together with a CD. Submissions may also be done via e-mail. Photographs would be appreciated. These visuals may also be e-mailed as jpg files. Contributions by regular mail may be addressed to:

Mrs Soo Kim Bee
Editor, ASCD REVIEW (Singapore)
c/o ASCD Secretariat Office
Tele-Temps Pte Ltd.
1002 Toa Payoh Industrial Park #06-1475
Singapore 319074
Tel: 6250-7700
Or E-mail: Soo_Kim_Bee@moe.gov.sg

The theme for the forthcoming issue is:

Vol. 14: Educating the Whole Child
Deadline for articles: 31 July 2007

