EL Classroom *inquiry*

It is about what works in the English Language classroom

issue

6

Contents

A Classroom *inquiry*

Guided by Shalini, Master Teacher/ English Language (EL), during her attachment at our school, we explored the writer-oriented teaching approach that encourages writing as personal expression.

By Azizah Latiff, Lee Siew Fung, Noranisah Kamis, Angela Albert, Yogeswary Subramaniam (Chua Chu Kang Primary School) and Shalini Damodaran (ELIS)

The Joy of Writing in the English Language Classroom

Introduction by Shalini

When it comes to the teaching of writing, the common refrain amongst our teachers often is: how do we make writing fun for our students. Most students dislike writing and as teachers of writing we have heard many a student groan, yawn or sigh when they are assigned writing tasks.

Why would students want to write if they are writing for the teacher who assesses their writing on topics that do not interest them? Why would students put in a great deal of effort into their writing if the response is going to be a page full of red marks that threaten to drown out their own writing? We would be reluctant writers too if we were presented with a similar scenario. Imagine writing about 'A Robbery', 'A Mischievous Act' or three pictures that do not inspire us simply because they are not within our scope of experience.

In order to engage students meaningfully in the act of writing, we first need to believe that every child has his or her own unique story to tell. How do we get students to believe there is value in their own knowledge and experiences, and that these can make for special stories? How do we get students to discover the joy of writing their own stories? How do we get students to feel the joy that comes from communicating what is special to them? How do we get students to re-live their experiences through different reader responses when they write?

Teachers of Chua Chu Kang Primary School expressed similar concerns and struggles in inspiring their students to write. So, during my attachment at Chua Chu Kang Primary School, Azizah Latiff, Lee Siew Fung, Noranisah Kamis, Angela Albert, and Yogeswary Subramaniam who had participated in the Budding Writers Professional Learning Programme, were encouraged to form a Special Interest Group (SIG) to investigate how to make writing meaningful and joyful for their students.

The Classroom Inquiry Project by the SIG

The Theory underlying the Practice

Guided by Shalini, Master Teacher/ EL, during her attachment at our school, we explored the writer-oriented teaching approach that encourages writing as personal expression. This view originates largely from Peter Elbow's principles of writing (see **Figure 1**). It advocates starting with the 'self' and encourages student writers to discover their own voices by engaging in freewriting, in which students write spontaneously first from their personal experiences and prior knowledge.

Figure 1: What is Freewriting?

Freewriting is a simple ten-minute writing exercise with the following terms of writing:

- Write without stopping.
- **It's private.** You can decide tomorrow or next week to share what you write today, but it's best to write with the expectation of not sharing.
- Don't worry about any standards for writing.

There are two variations of freewriting:

- **Focused freewriting.** Try to stay on one topic. When you wander off, just pull yourself back. This can help you get going and produce lots of words and thoughts for your writing. Many teachers improve class discussions by giving their students 5 minutes of private focused freewriting on a topic or a question before inviting discussion. Students invariably have much more to say after they have put down their first thoughts privately on paper.
- **Public freewriting.** Write with the expectation of sharing. This makes freewriting less safe, so you might let yourself make brief stops and cross outs and engage in a bit more planning. Works best when there is trust in the group – or considerable courage.
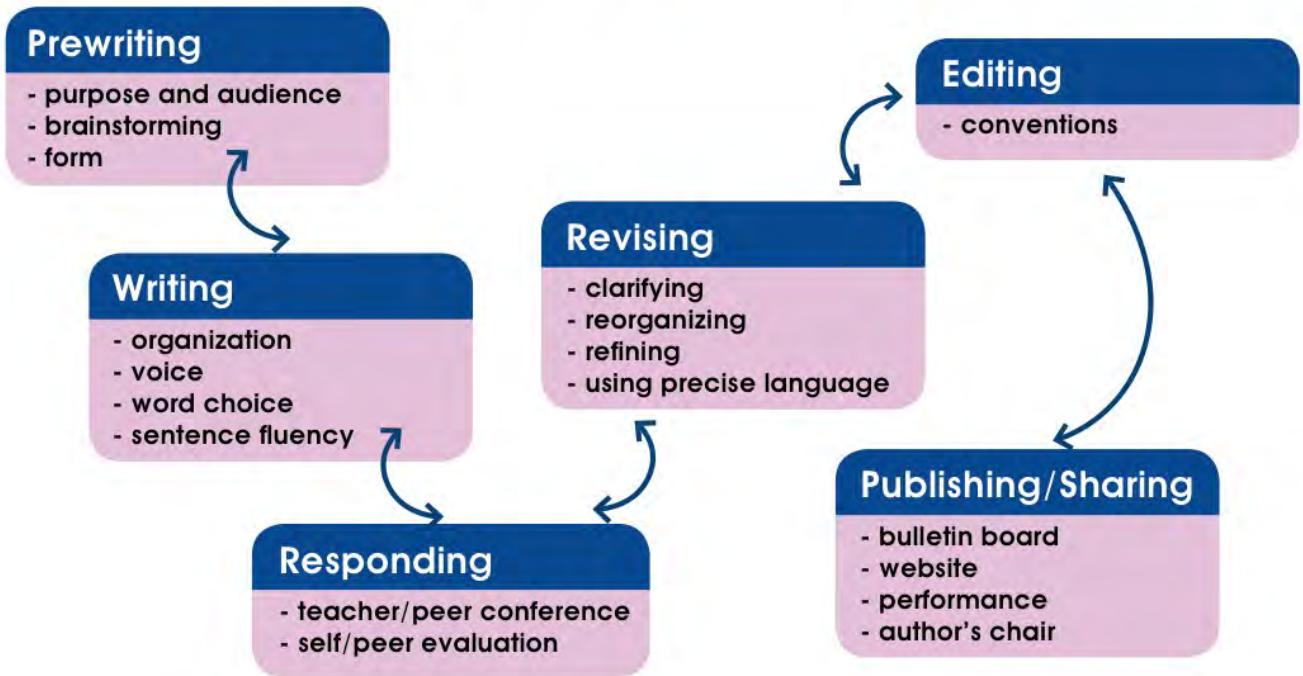
Adapted from Elbow (2010, p. 9 -10)

In the practice of freewriting, we teachers must take into account the fact that our students have varied needs and interests and that not every student will take to the practice of freewriting with ease. Therefore, it is important that we provide our students with varied levels of scaffolding when they engage in freewriting. We should also differentiate our instruction and appropriately select pre-writing activities which best cater to our students' needs and interests.

Based on Peter Elbow's suggestion that the most effective way to improve writing is: "to do freewriting exercises regularly" and "at least three times a week", we decided that the first step we needed to take was to create more opportunities for our students to write regularly within and beyond curriculum time. Then, we had to make the writing environment safe for our students by setting classroom norms before we took steps for students to write about their own personal experiences regularly. We also learnt that in order for students to discover the joy of writing, we needed to integrate writing, reading, speaking and listening in the EL classroom. This meant creating time for our students to not only write but to also read aloud their stories for peer response.
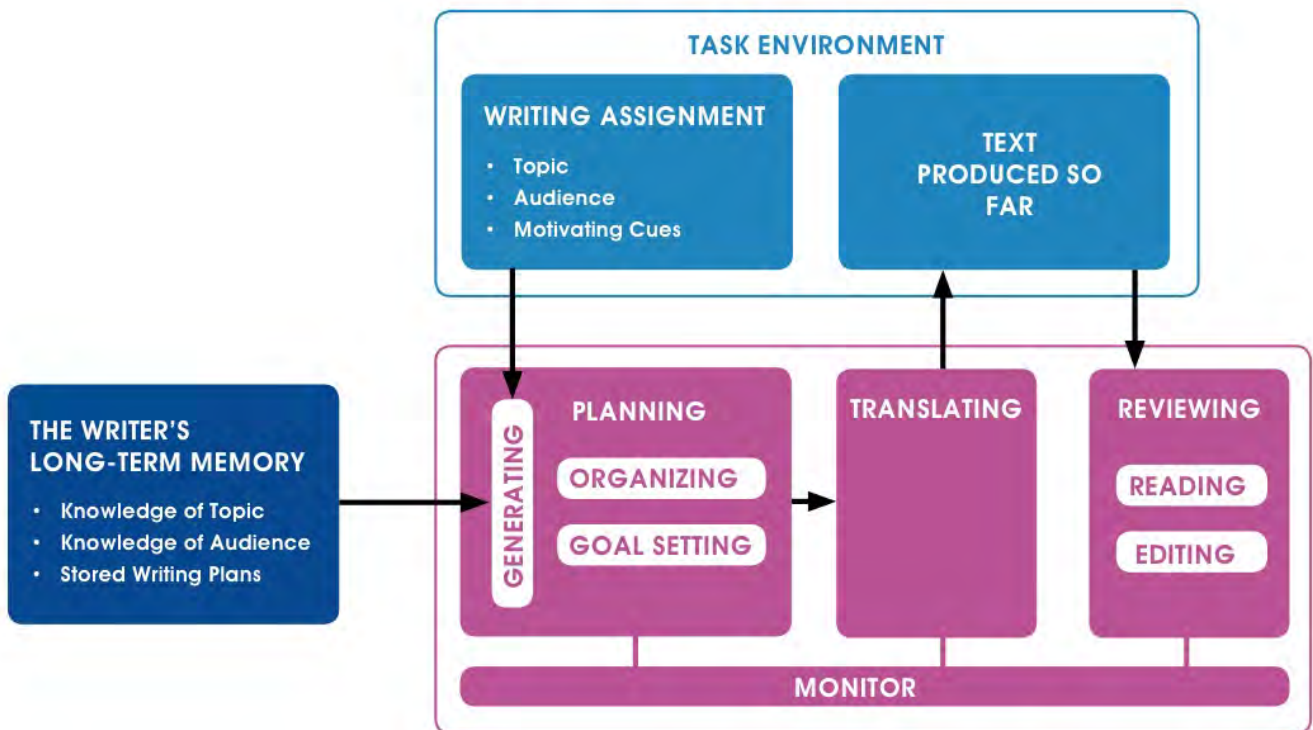
We also followed closely theories underpinning the teaching of writing in the Writing Process Cycle (**Figure 2**) and the Flower and Hayes Cognitive Process Model of the Composing Process (**Figure 3**). Pre-writing activities were therefore designed to change students' beliefs about themselves as not having anything of interest to write about.

Figure 2: The Writing Process Cycle

Prewriting
- purpose and audience
- brainstorming
- form

Writing
- organization
- voice
- word choice
- sentence fluency

Responding
- teacher/peer conference
- self/peer evaluation

Revising
- clarifying
- reorganizing
- refining
- using precise language

Editing
- conventions

Publishing/Sharing
- bulletin board
- website
- performance
- author's chair

Adapted from Hughes, J. M. (n.d.)

Figure 3: Flower and Hayes (1981) Cognitive Process Model of the Composing Process

TASK ENVIRONMENT

WRITING ASSIGNMENT
- Topic
- Audience
- Motivating Cues

TEXT PRODUCED SO FAR

THE WRITER'S LONG-TERM MEMORY
- Knowledge of Topic
- Knowledge of Audience
- Stored Writing Plans

GENERATING

PLANNING
- ORGANIZING
- GOAL SETTING

TRANSLATING

REVIEWING
- READING
- EDITING

MONITOR

Guided by our understanding of the theoretical underpinnings governing the writing process and the teaching of writing and learning, we crafted the following two questions for inquiry. The first question was an inquiry into the 'Opening Read' in which teachers would read aloud very short stories for one or two minutes followed by the 'Opening Write', which gave students an opportunity to write for about 5 minutes. The second question was an inquiry into 'pre-writing', 'writing', 'responding' and 'revising' strategies for students to engage in the Writing Process Cycle.

1) What is the impact of the 'Opening Read' and 'Opening Write' on student engagement and student writing?
2) What is the impact of writing activities like 'Listing and Selection of Ideas', 'Freewriting', 'Thoughtful Re-Reading', 'Nutshelling and Extended Activity', 'Drafting', and 'Say Back' on student engagement and student writing?

The Journey Begins

An important aspect of the teaching and learning of writing that is often overlooked is the intentional creation of a safe classroom environment that will inculcate values of mutual respect enabling students to express their ideas without fear of criticism. Hence, before embarking on the pre-writing stage it is vital to put norms and routines in place to regulate and shape students' behaviour and attitudes towards learning. A non-threatening learning environment will enable teachers to engage students more easily in activities that require them to read and respond, write and reflect, speak without inhibition and listen attentively in an EL lesson. We thus, introduced the following to set the tone and prepare students for pre-writing:

- **Fun Greetings** for students to acknowledge and express their respect for one another. This 2-minute activity was also an energiser that helped students to be fully present in class.
- **Norms** for students to write in a safe environment.
- **Writing Journals** - to encourage our students to write their personal stories regularly without fear or inhibition, we informed them that their journals would not be assessed. Students were also given choices. At times, they wrote for themselves. At other times, they wrote for their peers or for the teacher.

- **Opening Read** - we chose 2 to 3-minute short stories for the 'Opening Read' based on the profile and interests of our students. We also ensured that these stories were aligned to the themes related to the assignments stipulated in the Scheme of Work, with the explicit aim to inspire students with interesting short stories and to build their knowledge of the topic (see **Figure 4 - 6**).

Figure 4: Setting classroom norms

Set your own classroom norms with your students:

- **Be attentive.** Listen actively and with interest.
- **Don't be too hard on yourself and others.** Look at the strengths of the writing and ask questions on how to make improvements.
- **Be brave.** Share your stories with others.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 5: Starting the lesson

Start the lesson with:

- **Fun Greetings** - to infuse an element of fun to create a safe environment and build a culture of mutual trust and respect (1 minute).
- **A moment to reflect and centre one's thoughts** - close your eyes and put your problems and troubles aside, and breathe in and breathe out a few times (1 minute).
- **Opening Read** - read short stories or poems that are inspiring to stimulate students' interest (2 to 3 minutes).
- **Opening Write** - students write continuously without stopping (4 to 5 minutes).

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 6: Opening Read

Example of **Opening Read**

"The summit is believed to be the object of the climb. But its true object—the joy of living—is not in the peak itself, but in the adversities encountered on the way up. There are valleys, cliffs, streams, precipices, and slides, and as he walks these steep paths, the climber may think he cannot go any farther, or even that dying would be better than going on. But then he resumes fighting the difficulties directly in front of him, and when he is finally able to turn and look back at what he has overcome, he finds he has truly experienced the joy of living while on life's very road."

Yoshikawa, E. (2000). *Taiko: An epic novel of war and glory in feudal Japan*. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Opening Write - after reading aloud the short story, we gave our students 5 minutes to write in their journals. Students could respond to the story or write on any topic that was of interest to them. The aim of this activity was to encourage students to write about their own experiences and to discover the joy of writing without fear. We believed strongly that every child had a story to tell and so we created the space and time in our lessons for children to experience writing for different occasions and purposes (see **Figure 7**).

Figure 7: Opening Write

Example of **Opening Write**

Students are invited to write for 5 to 10 minutes on:

- any topic of their choice
- a response to the Opening Read
- a topic in the curriculum

Students may be given a sentence stem to begin their writing.

For example:
I wish…
I remember…
I will never…
I truly dislike…
I love music that…

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

A safe and respectful classroom environment enabled us to carry out the following activities in the writing process more comfortably: *Listing* (see **Figure 8**), *Quick Writing, Nutshelling and its Extended Activity* (see **Figure 9**), *Drafting* (see **Figure 10**), *Thoughtful Re-reading* (see **Figure 11**), and *Say Back* (see **Figure 12**). Through pre-writing activities such as 'listing' and 'freewriting', students learnt the value of their own knowledge and experiences for the writing process, and how they helped in activating their long term memory to generate ideas for writing. 'Nutshelling and its extended activity', 'thoughtful re-reading', 'drafting' and 'say back' helped students to respond and develop their own writing and that of their peers in meaningful ways.

Figure 8

Listing
- List 5 to 7 instances of hardship you or someone you know may have experienced.
- Go through your list.
- Put a star against the story that you would like to write about.
- Do a freewrite of that incident.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 9

Nutshelling
- Underline 1 sentence or phrase that best captures what you want to say.
- Write that sentence on the piece of paper large enough to be seen.
- Read and show your phrase to 2 partners in your group.

Nutshelling: Extended Activity
- Your partners must ask you questions. Author does not speak but writes down questions.
- After 2 to 3 minutes of questioning, author re-reads questions silently and circles relevant questions.
- Repeat the process with other partners.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 10

Drafting
- Look at all the questions that you have with you.
- Which questions are relevant for your writing? Which questions would you like to answer?
- You may want to categorise the questions according to theme, expression or elaboration for example.
- Write your second draft.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 11

Thoughtful Re-reading
- Put a star sign against key ideas.
- Underline images.
- Circle interesting words.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Figure 12

Say back
- In partnerships, choose A and B.
- A will read his second draft to B.
- B will listen carefully and say back what he or she has said - *so I hear you saying…* Point out what was memorable - *I can hear or see or feel…* Ask for clarification – *I would like to hear more about…*
- A will switch roles with B.
- The authors are encouraged to write down their peer's comments or questions on their writing.

(Adapted from Chicago Area Writing Project, 2014)

Findings by the SIG for the first area of inquiry

1) What is the impact of the **Opening Read** and **Opening Write** on student engagement and student writing?

Teachers in the SIG observed the following:

i. Opening Read

- Students enjoyed the 2 to 3-minute short stories that were read aloud by the teacher.
- It encouraged students to 'borrow' not just ideas but impactful words and phrases from the stories that inspired them. It also supported students to generate their own ideas or build on the ideas from the short story.
- In subsequent cycles, students were confident enough to share their own 'Opening Read' but we found that students had to be taught to read aloud to gain the attention of their peers.

ii. Opening Write

- There was a free flow of original ideas when the teacher made an effort to create a light-hearted or non-threatening environment. Students were told explicitly that they should write freely without worrying about grammar or spelling, and that the writing would not be assessed.
- Teacher modelling helped students to emulate the teacher and be more forthcoming in sharing their writing with their peers.
- Writing prompts that required students to write about their personal experiences helped students to generate authentic ideas for the on-demand writing.
- It was an avenue for less vocal students to express their feelings and thoughts in writing.

Findings by the SIG for the second area of inquiry

2) What is the impact of writing activities such as 'Listing and Selection of Ideas', 'Freewriting', 'Thoughtful Re-reading', 'Nutshelling and Extended Activity', 'Drafting', and 'Say Back' on student engagement and student writing?

Teachers in the SIG observed the following:

- **Listing and selection of ideas for writing** gave students a tool to generate ideas on a given topic. It gave teachers an opportunity to clarify students' misconceptions, early in the composing stage. It gave students opportunities to make decisions on what they wanted to write about. They often selected to write on experiences that were either meaningful to them or interesting to their peers.
- **Freewriting** enabled students to generate more ideas as firstly, they did not have to worry about grammar or spelling at this stage and secondly, they were writing about what they know and what they have personally experienced.
- **Nutshelling** - after the freewrite, students extracted an impactful phrase from their writing that could be used as a headline. In the next cycle, we found that they were more conscious about writing good phrases that captured the theme of their writing.
- **Nutshelling (Extended Activity)** - this sharing activity, in groups of three, helped students receive immediate feedback from their peers on their chosen phrase. Students were taught to ask the writer guiding questions using a 4W1H (What, Where, When, Why and How) frame. These questions from the readers helped students to generate more ideas before they moved on to the writing assignment. It was heartening to see students listen attentively to their peers' writing before giving their response. The reader response provided students with ideas on what other ideas they might want to include in their writing.
- **Thoughtful Re-reading** - in this section, students read their own writing again; they made a conscious effort to underline key images and circle interesting words they had used in their writing. Here the students were encouraged to rethink and review their writing for its effectiveness and identify possible gaps that they might not have picked up during the initial stages of writing. We observed that students' comprehension of their own writing improved as they looked out for gaps in the sequence and presentation of ideas.

Overall, students, especially the low progress learners, showed more engagement in writing about their authentic personal experiences. They seemed to be more immersed in writing about their experiences and reading aloud their writing. In addition, the questions from their peers at the pre-writing stage gave students more ideas to think about for their writing. Students' compositions were also more varied in content as students had selected what they wanted to write about based on their own personal experience, knowledge and views.

Teachers' Reflections on the Writing Process Cycle

Nora's Reflections

Before the introduction of pre-writing activities to get students to generate ideas, I used to get students to complete the Freytag's Pyramid frame in which students were required to write their story under the following headings: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. Although most students were able to complete the frame their stories often lacked coherence. Also, students end up trying to think of ideas for the exposition, rising action, climax and resolution at the composing stage while grappling with several issues at the same time – spelling, grammar, expression and coherence.

The introduction of pre-writing activities such as 'Opening Read', 'Opening Write' and 'Listing' created opportunities for my students to generate ideas for their writing. It helped them to recall their personal experiences and knowledge. I learnt more about my students' personal lives, pet peeves and what they enjoyed through their writing. Students enjoyed writing and sharing their writing with their peers in a safe and non-threatening environment that was intentionally created. For example, I noticed from the story recited by one student at the pre-writing stage that she misunderstood acts of mischief to include forgetting to do homework set by the teacher. Students' conceptual understanding of acts of mischief could therefore be addressed the next lesson with the class. The feedback loop was therefore shortened considerably as issues could be dealt with much earlier at the pre-writing stage instead of students waiting for the final product to be corrected by the teacher. Student memory of the writing would be more recent and they would pay more attention to the feedback given.

'Nutshelling' and activities that required students to share and respond to each other's stories helped student-authors to develop and organise their ideas, and identify gaps in their stories. I observed that children were also more engaged in the lesson, actively listening to their friends' stories and asking questions. They were happy to share their experiences and it seemed to have taken the pressure away from their own writing.

The final piece of writing had improved in fluency and voice. The pre-writing activities such as 'listing' that supported the generation of ideas contributed to students writing more original stories and interesting introductions because it helped students recall their personal experiences and knowledge. Students' conclusions were often, however, abrupt with many not knowing how to handle the resolution: It is like their energy just fizzled out.

My key learning:
Pre-writing activities are therefore an important part of the writing process that helps students generate ideas for their writing. Once they have generated ideas for their story it is easier for them to develop and organise their ideas for effect. I realise now that I need to get students to generate ideas first. Pre-writing activities such as 'listing' activates students' knowledge and experiences. It gets students to list a number of experiences before making a decision as to what they would like to write about. Introducing the Freytag frame at a later stage, after the generation and selection of ideas, helped my students to sequence their ideas more coherently. This was an 'a-ha' moment for me.

My 'Next Steps' were decided on after the analysis of student writing with the team. Though most students' writing revealed improvements in conceptual understanding of the topic, relevance and coherence, a significant number of students ended their conclusions abruptly. The SIG team then decided to guide students to think about "What Makes for Good Writing' before eliciting responses about the conclusion. Students were then required to re-write the conclusion in groups.

I used one of my student's compositions to look at writer's craft. I first guided students to look at what they liked about the composition before asking students questions about the conclusion. The class was then divided into groups to write an improved version of the typically abrupt conclusion. The groups shared with the class their version of the re-written conclusion and explained why it was an improvement. Students were then given time to revise and make improvements to the conclusions in their own compositions.

Yogeswary's Reflections

Students were given opportunities to generate ideas for their writing through the following pre-writing activities: 'Listing', 'Brainstorming' and 'Thoughtful Re-reading'. After which, they were required to write the first draft of their compositions at home on the same topic.

I was surprised by how motivated my students were to write their first draft. Students were also highly engaged when they were required to 'Read Aloud' their first draft to their friend, and respond to their friend's composition by carrying out the 'Say Back' (see **Figure 12** for details on how to carry out 'Say Back' in the classroom). **Figure 13** shows an example of a 'Say Back' that took place between 2 students in my class.

Figure 13: An example of Say Back

An example of students responding to their friends' story that was read aloud to them.
Reader response: I would like to hear more about what you and your friends were doing when the snake popped out.
Student Author: I wrote that I froze what…
Reader response: ya, but what were they doing?

Reader response: I could hear you screaming…
Student Author: No, I did not scream (author reads relevant line from his story flashed on the board)
Readers' Response: laugh

Reader Response: What did you tell your parents?
Author: …(pause)

Reader Response: I would like to hear more about how you gestured to your friends when the snake popped out.
Student Author: My teacher gestured (Reading from his writing)
Reader response: How? Did she wave? How? Did she signal?

Before, I used to use the 'Class Dictated Writing' approach to teach my students writing. Often when the theme did not fall within the scope of a student's experience as in the case of 'a cheating experience', they would end up copying my story. Students, in these cases, struggled to generate relevant ideas for the topic. This affected their coherence and clarity in what they were writing.

The above example in **Figure 13** shows mutual respect between the student-author and the reader. Both are engaged in a dialogue, with the reader listening actively and articulating his questions for the author while the author thinks about the relevance of the reader's concerns. The questions would have given the writer an opportunity to think about the reader response and whether or not he would want to address them in his next draft.

Some students shared with the class what was memorable about their peers' stories and what they wanted to know more about.

Following that, students were engaged in 'Thoughtful Re-reading' (see **Figure 11**) of their own writing. I emphasised to students that not all their peers' questions had to be addressed. Students needed to decide if addressing their peers' responses would help improve the writing. "What would you like to revise based on what your friends have asked?"

I was surprised how the use of process writing in the class of largely middle progress learners helped these students make improvements in their writing, particularly in the areas of voice, coherence and clarity compared to the class with largely high progress learners who did not go through the writing process.

Angela's Reflections

At first, I was quite hesitant to begin this writing process with my class because of time constraints. I know that my students are slow writers and the writing process will take up too much time. After going through the process for two days, I realised that making my students write in class using pre-writing activities such as 'Opening Write', and 'Listing' and selection of ideas gave them an opportunity to really think about what they wanted to write about. At first, when told to write about anything during 'Opening Write', some of the students were quite reluctant and did not know what to write. However, after they were told not to worry about being correct in terms of grammar and that their writing was confidential, they started to pen down their thoughts more freely. I feel that their lack of ability in expressing themselves is one of the main reasons why they are afraid to write. They usually do not have this problem when it comes to oral communication. I am sure, over time, with more opportunities to do freewriting, they will improve.

I thought that the special way of greeting each other to begin the lesson was helpful in getting students to acknowledge their peers' presence in class. I could see that my students enjoyed the activity. It was my first time doing the centring activity with my students. It was a simple activity. I got the students to stand up, and breathe in and breathe out calmly a couple of times. I thought it was a good way of getting them to be ready for the lesson.

The 'Opening Read' is a good way of exposing students to different short stories and also to teach them listening skills. However, I felt that my story was a little too long and some students could not follow it. In future, I will choose shorter stories.

A lot of time was also spent on the follow-up activities (freewriting and sharing in groups of three) on the second day. Students took a long time in writing out the questions in the 'Nutshelling' extended activity. I noticed that some of them wrote things that were not really relevant to the topic. This, however, gave me an opportunity to clarify and provide timely feedback.
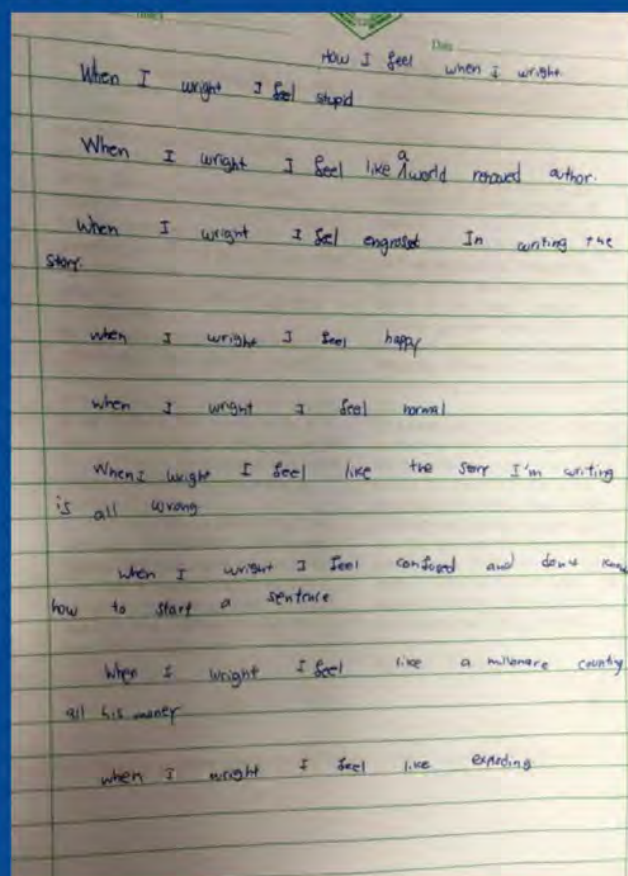
The writing process does take up a lot of time. However, I do agree that quality writing experience is important and will equip students to become better writers over time. The ability to express themselves and write well will definitely help my students in the other components, especially in answering comprehension questions.

The following freewrite by the student reflects heightened engagement in the act of writing.

Writing Prompt:
What are your thoughts about yourself as a writer? Do you like to write?

Figure 14: An example of Freewrite

The freewrite captures succinctly and comprehensively the myriad of emotions a writer goes through. The student author seems to have found the appropriate words and metaphors to describe what she feels. It reflects the student's level of engagement in the writing. It is also interesting that the student has chosen to write this piece in the form of a poem. She playfully begins every line with the anaphora: 'When I write...', mirroring earlier pre-writing activities that exposed these students to poems such as 'Where I am from' and 'I Remember' that began every line with "I am from..." and "I remember..." respectively.

Appendix 1

Example of Opening Read

I Remember by Edward Montez

I remember the scent of acorn soup cooking and deer meat frying in quiet evenings of summer.

And shivering under thin blankets in winter and watching the wallpaper dance to the force of the winter winds outside.

I remember the cry of an owl in the night and I knew it was an ominous warning, a cry of death.

I remember running in the dust behind the medicine truck when it came to the reservation, lifesavers was a free treat.

And grandpa sitting in his favorite resting chair under his favorite shade tree with his dog "Oly" by his side.

I remember running naked and screaming with my aunt in hot pursuit, a stick in her hand, she always caught me.

And every summer we would swim in the river and let the sun bake us until we were a shade less than purple, basking on the riverbank, undisturbed, at peace.

And I remember grandma toiling in the bean fields while I played with my army truck on the fender of a '49 Plymouth.

I remember going to the movies in town on Saturday nights with fifty cents in my pocket, thirty-five cents for the ticket and the rest was mine.

Eating popcorn and drinking water from a discarded Coke cup and rooting for the Indians to win, and they never did, but that was yesterday.

Source: *SpringBoard English language arts, Senior English.* (2014, p. 24).

Student A's Opening Write

I treasure my dog in India. Since my father does not allow me to have a dog in Singapore, I treasure every moment with it. Its name is Lakshmana and only Hindus will understand what it means. When I was very young, I grew up with another dog which was named Tiger. It was my closest companion I had before Lakshmana but sadly it died in 2011 or 2012. I think it was May. When my grandmother called and told us, I cried for days. I was not happy when they got another dog to replace my Tiger. However, It grew up to be another companion of mine. By this experience, I understood that it is okay to include another life into mine. I have never forgotten Tiger or Lakshmana and I never will.

Student B's Opening Write

Writing prompt: I wish...

I wish

I wish I had superpowers so I can stop time and enjoy recess even more

I wish that I had wings so I do not need to walk up the stairs. I am always sweaty and tired after I climb up the stairs.

I wish I have a lot of money so I can buy anything. I can even buy presents for my friends during their birthdays

Student C's Listing

Listing
My Achievements
CCKPS Star (P1)

My Achievements

1. CCKPS STAR (P1)
2. Learning to walk (1½ yrs)
3) Oddessy of the mind (2nd place)
4. Poem recitation (1st place P1)
5. CCKPS STAR (P2)
6. Sports carnival (P4) GOLD
7. Learning how to swim

It was an achievement as it is really my dream to act when I grow up and I felt extremely exilarated! It was not 1st place but I think 2nd place is still amazing to me! I thought negatively that we may not be too good as we lost one of the props had gone missing but it was a small prop.

Student D's Poem

Where I'm From by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
    from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
    and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
    with a cottonball lamb
    and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
    to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments--
snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.

Source: Lyon, G. E. (n.d.). *Where I'm From.* Retrieved January 12, 2017 from http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html

Where I'm From by Student D

References

Elbow, P. (2010). 7. *Freewriting: An obvious and easy way to speak onto the page.* Emeritus Faculty Author Gallery. Paper 35. Retrieved November 30, 2016 from http://scholarworks.umass.edu/emeritus_sw/35

Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication, 32* (4), 365–387.

Hughes, J. M. (n.d.). *The Writing Process.* Retrieved April 2, 2016 from http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Writing/WritingProcess.html

SpringBoard English language arts, Senior English. (2014, p. 24). Retrieved January 12, 2017, from http://www.avon-schools.org/cms/lib02/IN01001885/Centricity/Domain/3504/Senior%20English%20Unit%201%20-%20Student.pdf

Yoshikawa, E. (2000). *Taiko: An epic novel of war and glory in feudal Japan.* Tokyo: Kodansha International.

A LESSON STUDY ON RECIPROCAL TEACHING

By Sakunthalai Surian, Choong Pei Chin, Keveri Rajoo, Cherlyn Tan Jin Ping, Lee Soh Mui, Paul Yuen Weiwen, Matthias Wan Zi Cheng (Queenstown Secondary School) and Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray (ELIS)

Reciprocal Teaching

Developing Reading Comprehension Skills Using Reciprocal Teaching

A team of English Language (EL) teachers from Queenstown Secondary School consisting of Sakunthalai Surian, Senior Teacher/ EL, Choong Pei Chin, Head of Department (HOD)/ EL, Keveri Rajoo, Subject Head/ EL, and teachers, Cherlyn Tan Jin Ping, Lee Soh Mui, Paul Yuen Weiwen and Matthias Wan Zi Cheng formed a Special Interest Group (SIG) after participating in ELIS's Professional Learning Programme (PLP) on Teaching Reading and Viewing. They explored the use of learner strategies to help lower secondary students who were less skilful readers in constructing meaning from texts read. The teachers embarked on Lesson Study to examine the use of Reciprocal Teaching (RT) to develop the comprehension skills of their students.

In collaboration with Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray, Master Teacher/ EL, the teachers facilitated their students' active engagement with texts read using learner strategies for predicting content, questioning peers about information read, clarifying words and ideas in the text and summarising key ideas. These students gradually developed deeper understanding of the processes involved in meaning construction and displayed enhanced reading competence and comprehension of texts. The outcomes of the Lesson Study demonstrate the need to teach students reading skills explicitly and also create opportunities for them to think critically about what they read.

How a team of lower secondary teachers collaborated with a Master Teacher on the use of Reciprocal Teaching to engage students with their reading texts

Before the Lesson Study

Background

Prior to the Lesson Study, the HOD/ EL and EL teachers in collaboration with Jeya, identified reading comprehension as an area of concern. Many of the lower secondary students did not engage with the texts they read, experienced difficulties understanding what they read and could not make within-and between-sentence connections. They lacked the schema to make sense of text meaning as they did not read widely. Students also lacked the learner strategies to unpack the texts they read. As a result, they often provided inadequate or incorrect answers to comprehension questions based on the text.

Having attended the PLP on Teaching Reading and Viewing, More than Meets the Eye, facilitated by Jeya in Semester 1 in 2015, a team of teachers formed an SIG to explore ways to support students when interacting with texts and constructing meaning from them. We learnt from the PLP that we had to adopt a more deliberate approach to teaching students reading skills and show them how to apply these skills to various types of texts. We also realised that it was clearly insufficient to teach reading skills by focusing only on preparing students for comprehension questions found in summative assessments by completing practice papers. Instead we needed to empower our students with appropriate learner strategies to actively and strategically process texts for meaning.

Planning the Lesson Study

We began our professional learning conversations with Jeya in Semester 2 of 2015 and these continued the following year in Semester 1. We followed the same group of Secondary 1 Express students to Secondary 2 and continued with the Lesson Study, aligning our project with the lessons planned in the scheme of work. Using EL Syllabus 2010 as our guide, we studied the reading and viewing Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Skills, Learner Strategies, Attitudes and Behaviour (SSAB). We focused on LOs 2 and 3 as we wanted to develop our students' close and critical reading skills. We then selected the relevant SSAB. **Table 1** shows the LOs and SSAB that guided our planning.

Table 1: Reading and Viewing LOs and SSAB

	SSAB
LO2: Close Reading and Viewing Process and comprehend age-/ year level-appropriate texts at literal and inferential levels	• Use prior knowledge (e.g., knowledge of the topic, familiar concepts or socio-cultural knowledge) • Use contextual clues • Make predictions • Ask a variety of questions at different levels (e.g., clarifying, open-ended questions) about the texts read or viewed • Summarise ideas (from one/ multiple paragraphs or an extract)
LO3: Critical Reading, Viewing and Appreciation Apply critical reading and viewing by focusing on implied meaning, higher order thinking, judgement and evaluation	• Read or view a text closely and offer interpretations of it • Recognise writer's intentions

We considered these LOs and SSAB as we discussed the learner strategy instruction that we would engage in to develop our students' close and critical reading skills. We had learnt about RT during the PLP and decided to read more about this dialogic approach along with other strategies to teach reading skills.

Literature Review

From our reading, we learnt that skilful readers use multiple learner strategies such as decoding, predicting and questioning when reading. Learners who struggle with comprehension are usually unaware of what good readers do and have to be shown how and when to use a repertoire of reading strategies (Graham & Bellert, 2004).

RT involves a multi-purpose group of comprehension strategies. It is a scaffolded discussion technique that supports students to be active leaders in small group reading discussions. Underpinning RT are four foundations: scaffolding, think aloud, collaborative learning and metacognition. **Table 2** describes the four foundations underpinning RT. Students engage in a dialogue based on different segments of a text using four strategies, namely predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising. **Table 3** lists the four RT reader roles. By asking students to clarify, they need to engage in critical evaluation as they read, and to make predictions about future content involves students in drawing and testing inferences. Students engage with the text at a deeper level by asking questions about it and summarising key information in the text (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Students take turns to play these roles which can be taught in any order, depending on students' needs and abilities and which can be used strategically to develop their reading skills.

Table 2: Revision using the S.T.A.R. Framework

1. **Scaffolding:** providing support and feedback for students as they begin to use RT strategies
2. **Think Aloud:** modelling the use of learner strategies and pausing to reflect aloud in front of students, making thinking visible
3. **Metacognition:** reflecting on one's own thinking processes
4. **Collaborative learning:** working together to construct meaning from text

Adapted from Oczkus (2003)

Table 3: Four roles in Reciprocal Teaching

1. **Predictor**
2. **Clarifier**
3. **Questioner**
4. **Summariser**

Informed by our reading, we collectively decided to use RT as it offers huge potential for meaningful discussions between teacher and students and also among peers.

The Lesson Study Process

We adopted the Lesson Study Process (Stepanek, Appel, Leong, Mangan, & Mitchell, 2007) to enable us to look deeply at student learning and thinking, particularly students' metacognitive processing. We believed that the Lesson Study processes would help us in refining our instructional strategies and delivery and also enhance our lesson planning. **Figure 1** illustrates the Lesson Study process that we used to guide us in our inquiry.

Figure 1: Lesson Study Process
(Stepanek et. al., 2007, p3.)

As part of Lesson Study protocols, one of our teachers, Cherlyn, agreed to conduct the lessons while the rest of us together with Jeya, our critical friend, observed the lessons. We would make enhancements to the lesson plans based on the discussion and feedback gathered during the post-lesson study discussions. The other three teachers in the level would teach the revised lessons and give feedback on them.

We began our collaborative lesson planning by making a careful selection of the texts that the students would use for their discussion. We considered factors such as students' interest, suitability and readability of the texts and how these texts would help facilitate rich discussions among students.

Being mindful of our students' learning profiles, we decided to teach each role separately as we felt that our students needed more time to learn and internalise the skills involved. Given the time we had to embark on the Lesson Study, we decided to teach the predictor and summariser roles in the latter part of Semester 2 of 2015 and focused on the clarifier and questioner roles in early 2016. Our students were fairly familiar with the skills of predicting and summarising and thus would be able to engage in the RT roles. We felt that we could devote more time in 2016 to the complementary roles of questioner and clarifier, especially since our students did not ask questions spontaneously. The students integrated all four roles in subsequent lessons. We had dedicated a total of 10 lessons to teach the RT strategies. We believed that our students would develop a deeper understanding of each of the four roles and use them more effectively if we taught them these roles one at a time.

As part of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) approach, the teacher first modelled each role using a part of the text. Next, students engaged in guided practice of the role with the teacher and peers before they played the role independently. We also decided to use Role Cards which included sentence starters for the roles to scaffold students' learning of these roles.

We designed our lessons guided by the three-phases of reading, namely pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. **Table 4** illustrates how we designed an RT lesson on teaching the Questioner role.

Table 4: Example of an RT lesson to teach the Questioner role

Pre - reading phase

- Teacher showed students the following words: SLAUGHTER! MASSACRE! HORROR! CRIME! BLOOD! SCREAMS! TEARS! to arouse students' curiosity and activate their prior knowledge.
- Teacher elicited students' responses to the excerpt and asked them to predict what the text was about, applying skills taught previously such as using cohesive devices and prior knowledge.
- Teacher discussed the ravages of war and its impact on people.

While-reading phase

- Teacher showed students a paragraph from Zlata's Diary and modelled the Questioner role using Think Aloud.
- After modelling the role, teacher highlighted to students salient features of the role. She elicited students' responses to the questions generated earlier. Students predicted what would happen next in the narrative.
- Teacher showed students another paragraph and led a guided discussion to generate questions on the paragraph. Students generated questions using some of the question stems in the Role Cards.
- Students predicted what would happen next in the narrative. They worked in pairs on another paragraph to generate questions on it.
- Teacher monitored and guided the pair-work. She elicited from students the questions they had crafted. Teacher and students discussed responses to the questions.
- Students in groups generated questions for the remaining paragraphs and recorded their questions in the Four-Door Chart.

Post - reading phase

- Teacher reviewed the Questioner role with students. Students reflected on their learning and use of questioning skills.

To monitor students' learning during the RT lessons as part of assessment for learning and also to ensure individual accountability, we used a Four-Door Chart. **Figure 2** illustrates a student's Four-Door Chart with the four RT roles.

Figure 2: Example of a Four-Door Chart

Amanda Ng
2D
1. Summarizer

Alot of people died during the world.

The writer's mother friend was on the way to save someone's life.

2. Questioner

Why is the mother in tears?
Why is the father called back for service?

How many people died?
Why was the doctor death reported?

Why was the writer writing about war, death, injuries, shells, sadness and sorrow?
Why was Zlata still alive when all her friends

3. Clarifier

As the father was called back for service.
As the father was a police reserve.

Lots of people died.
He is a famous doctor.

4. Predictor
I think the city was destroyed and there were many dead bodies on the streets.
There are a lot of dead bodies.

The Four-Door Chart gave us some input on how students were growing in their use of RT and the extent of their participation in the dialogue on the texts read. We examined the types of questions they had asked and the clarifications they provided. The Four-Door Chart also helped us to identify students who needed more help from the teacher. In addition, we used reflection guides to gather students' feedback on the lessons taught and made necessary adjustments to the learning experience.

Observations of Our Students' Learning

We observed our students' learning during the Lesson Study and during our post-lesson study discussion, we focused on aspects that facilitated or hindered the learning of the RT roles.

Explicit teaching of the roles

We felt convinced that the cognitive modelling and scaffolding of the reading processes supported students in learning the roles more effectively. Although it took us longer to complete our comprehension lessons, we felt that our students learned the roles more effectively when they were taught these roles one at a time and with a review of the strategies taught previously. Students engaged in deeper and higher levels of thinking with better understanding of the texts read as a result of the time and space provided to unpack the texts. Each of the roles served one or more definite purposes. However, when students played all four roles they reaped even greater benefits. They were able to comprehend better, constructing meaning from texts and also became more aware of how to monitor their comprehension.

Questioning

Initially, when students played the Questioner role, they did not generate many questions and focused mainly on lower order questions, eliciting information that could be easily derived from the text. We taught students how to ask different types of questions, guided by the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. We scaffolded their learning through the use of question stems in the Role Cards. We saw a gradual improvement in the quality of students' questions as they framed higher order questions about the text, showing a deeper understanding of the text.

Collaborative Learning

We noticed that the student groupings mattered a lot for the students involved in the Lesson Study as some groups tended to be rather quiet and played their roles almost in silence. This went against the tenet of RT which encourages active engagement in a dialogue. With deliberate groupings done by the teacher in subsequent lessons, communication among group members improved and we saw robust group discussions.

Monitoring Learning

We encouraged students to be reflective and metacognitive in their use of the learner strategies throughout the lessons. We used reflection guides to help students reflect on the learner strategies they used and identify any difficulties they experienced. We noticed that students grew in the process and gradually displayed confidence in using the comprehension strategies. One student, Yeo Xi Yan, reflected, "I am pretty confident now although at first I struggled to apply the strategies when reading. I am now ready to use these skills in future." Another student, Patricia Isabel Ang, said, "The strategies helped me in understanding the paragraphs more as I have learnt certain techniques which can help me a lot in comprehension questions." "However," she added, "I need to work on clarifying as there are certain questions that I may not know how to answer."

An unexpected consequence of the Lesson Study was that we found students keen to find out the endings of some of the stories on which we based our comprehension texts. Some students were so inspired that they borrowed all the copies of Zlata's Diary, The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole and The Conch Bearer that were available in the school library. One group of students went as far as writing a sequel to The Conch Bearer. We were pleasantly surprised and delighted by these unexpected student outcomes.

Conclusion

Our Lesson Study shows that RT is a powerful tool that enables students to become more strategic and independent readers. The RT roles helped students to actively engage with the texts which led to an enhanced understanding of these texts. However, it is imperative that teachers scaffold the learning of the roles through modelling using Think Aloud and guided practice. Teachers also need to motivate their students to use the learner strategies, monitor the learning and provide feedback. The ultimate goal of learner strategy instruction is for students to spontaneously use the strategies. Through this Lesson Study project, our team has grown professionally, engaging in rich conversations that facilitate knowledge construction and creation.

Teachers' Reflections

Cherlyn: The collaborative nature of the Lesson Study sessions, the lesson observations and the post-lesson discussions have allowed me to reflect more critically on my teaching. It has also deepened my knowledge and skills in facilitating comprehension lessons. Furthermore, I am more aware of how the strategies I use and the way I facilitate lessons can impact my students' learning experiences and outcomes. My students are more engaged in the classroom. They are confident of their abilities to adopt the various roles independently and feel that this process will help them to better understand the stories they read. I also feel more competent in designing lessons that cater to my students' learning needs and abilities. The reflective nature of this entire Lesson Study process has also trained me to constantly think about what problems students may face in the classroom and how I can help them.

Paul: Taking the learning needs of students into consideration, I find such sessions valuable as they allow us to examine the flow of lessons and address areas that can be improved. Under the guidance of a Master Teacher, Ms Jeya, in a collaborative environment, it allows us to find solutions and also improve our teaching practices. The use of pre- and post-lesson discussions were beneficial. In addition, the discussions aided us in our professional learning as we were exposed to the various successful teaching practices of our peers. Students are now more aware of the various reading strategies that they can employ while tackling comprehension passages. I've also adapted RT for my banded Sec 4 N(A) class.

Soh Mui: Personally, I think that RT beats other strategies as I see more student engagement than using other methods to teach comprehension. Students learn to think critically and question texts that are presented to them. It almost becomes a natural reflex action after a while. I am thinking of using the RT strategies with visual texts. Post-lesson discussions are good as we sit together to give feedback and continue to learn from one another. I will definitely use this method to teach. It may mean more work but it is worth it.

Matthias: Students are doing more close reading of the text rather than just answering the questions. I now focus more on the need for students to do close reading of the text, making them summarise in writing each paragraph, and ask 'internal' questions, before allowing them to look at the questions at the end of the passage. I intend to use RT on a long term basis, together with other strategies like visualisation and differentiated instruction, to maximise the learning of my students who have diverse needs.

Sakun: As an observer, it was an enriching experience for me. I have been able to apply RT with my upper secondary classes. It is very clear that the dialogic approach involved in RT enables students to think more deeply and take ownership of their learning. The post-lesson study discussions that we had after every lesson helped us to better understand learner behaviour.

References

Curriculum Planning & Development Division. (2010). *English Language Syllabus 2010.* Singapore: Ministry of Education.

Graham, L. & Bellert, A. (2004). Difficulties in reading comprehension for students with learning difficulties. In B. Wong, (Ed.) *Learning about learning disabilities* (pp. 251–279), San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic.

Oczkus, L. D. (2003). *Reciprocal teaching at work: Strategies for improving reading comprehension.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Palinscar, A. S. & Brown, A. L. (1984). *Reciprocal teaching of comprehension fostering and comprehension monitoring activities. Cognition and Instruction, 1*(2), 117-175.

Pearson, P. D., & Gallagher, M. C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary educational psychology, 8*(3), 317-344.

Stepanek, J., Appel, G., Leong, M., Mangan, M.T., & Mitchell, M. (2007). *Leading lesson study: A practical guide for teachers and facilitators.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Three Lead Teachers and one EL HOD formed a Special Interest Group with the aim to equip Primary Six students with the skills to become effective writers. In collaboration with Prisca Lee, Master Teacher/ EL, the teachers explored the teaching of the writing process focusing on how to teach each component of the writing process: planning, drafting, revising and editing.

By Shanti Marion Prakash (Tao Nan School), Leslie Lai (Innova Primary School), Wong Bing Sum (Radin Mas Primary School), Doreen Chan (Woodlands Primary School) and Prisca Lee (ELIS)

Exploring the Writing Process

Introduction

Writing has always been a challenge for many of our students, especially those who do not have a good command of the language. Not only do they have to grapple with generating ideas on the topic of focus, they also face the issue of coherently developing these ideas. We often ask ourselves how we can help our students become effective writers. This is the question that brought the four members of this Special Interest Group (SIG) together. We wanted to deepen our understanding of the teaching of writing and to focus on cultivating writing skills in our students through a structured writing process.

Getting Students Ready to Write

To build students' confidence in writing, we first worked on developing students' writing fluency. This was done through regular quick writes in class. Both print and non-print stimuli (e.g., poems, newspaper articles, photographs, picture illustrations, video and audio recordings) were used as writing prompts for the quick writes. Students were given five to ten minutes to respond to a writing prompt and to pen down their thoughts and ideas into their Writer's Notebooks. After that, they shared their quick writes with their shoulder partners.

The Writer's Notebook was a safe and private space for the collection of students' thoughts. Students were free to express themselves in response to the writing prompts. They wrote without fear of judgement because these quick writes were not marked or assessed by the teacher. The responses from their peers during the read-aloud sessions provided the students with feedback on their quick writes. Students were encouraged to illustrate their thoughts if words failed them. If their response was something very personal, they would label it "Private", and when their Writer's Notebooks were collected for comments by the teacher, the students were assured that their privacy would be respected. These regular bite-sized writing exercises familiarised students with the process of writing and made writing less daunting for them. Their quick writes formed an idea bank for subsequent writing tasks.

In addition to being an idea bank, the Writer's Notebook allowed students to write from their hearts and develop their authorial voice. It was their voice that was heard in these quick writes because of the spontaneous nature of the writing activity. Stock phrases like "The salmon pink sky greeted me as fluffy white clouds floated past my window" were never used and students discovered for themselves that a genuine voice is what really connects the reader to the writer. The idea of voice was concretised through the read-aloud sessions that they engaged in after their quick writes, and students were encouraged to use this "voice" in their class writing assignments.

Idea Generation

In preparation for class writing assignments, quick writes were preceded by the listing of ideas. Students were given print or non-print stimuli based on the theme of the writing task, or according to a particular picture that was part of the writing task. After the students had listed their ideas, they would select their ideas by numbering them and grouping them according to similarity of ideas and crossing out any ideas which they wished to discard. Students would read through their entire list and write a statement that broadly described their list of ideas and opinions. After that, students would do a quick write based on the broad statement that they crafted. These activities stimulated the students' thinking and allowed them to express their thoughts and perspectives about the assigned writing topic. These pre-writing activities helped the students have a better understanding of the topic and resulted in richer content.

Students consolidated what they knew or what they had found out through reading or research on a topic using a Topic Blast frame (Gallagher, 2006). From there, we led our students to discuss and share their ideas with their peers to expand their understanding of the topic. This initial stage provided a good platform for the students to make connections between their prior knowledge and the topic of discussion. It also helped those without any inkling of the topic to build a resource bank for their writing.

Idea Development

We used the story arc to teach the five elements of a narrative text: (a) orientation, (b) complication, (c) climax, (d) resolution and (e) coda. Activities that we conducted involved getting students to view videos, observe the plots and work individually or as a group to plot the story arcs. Our students enjoyed the activities, especially the exposure to the differing views pertaining to the identification of climax. We seized the opportunity to get our students to pose clarification questions so that their peers could justify their views. We began to believe that such productive talk could facilitate the development of critical thinking skills, a disposition that is much needed in all aspects of learning.

To help our students organise ideas, we used the Transition-Action-Details (TAD) strategy (Peha, 1995), which guided their thinking in sequencing the events of a narrative. When filling out the TAD frame as shown in **Figure 1**, students selected relevant ideas from the idea generation sessions and added details for each action.

Figure 1: Transition-Action-Details (TAD)

With regard to characterisation, we used the Do-Say-Think-Feel strategy (Peha, 1995) as conversation starters during class discussions. Students were given visual stimuli to discuss and interpret characters' actions, speech, thinking and feelings – a cognitive process which they could internalise to enliven their writing. See example of student's work in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: Do-Say-Think-Feel

CHARACTERISATION

What does your character do? (ACTIONS) Actions/Behaviour	What does your character say? (SPEECH) Dialogues/Exclamation & Utterance
• Showed off his toy to Jerry • Exchanged terrified glances with Jerry • Shoved aside by Billy • Forgave Billy for his actions • Could not bear to leave his toy. • Hot tears began forming in his eyes.	• "I ... " • "Here ... " I stammered, hands shaking as I placed my 'Angry Bird' toy reluctantly onto his outstretched hands.
What does your character think? (THOUGHTS) Inner thoughts/Self-Talk	How does your character feel? (EMOTIONS)
• Billy was fighting. • Billy had changed a lot. • Jerry was a good friend.	• Proud • Frightened • Upset • Happy

All writers go through several stages of revision; they would seek others' responses, edit their writing for errors and eventually realise that writing is never perfect and always open to revision. Adapting ideas from *Teaching Adolescent Writers* (Gallagher, 2006), we taught our students the STAR (Substitute, Take things out, Add and Rearrange) strategy to revise their drafts as shown in **Figure 3**. In using the STAR strategy, students learned how to substitute overused words, take away unnecessary repetitions, add details and rearrange the sequence for a coherent flow. Students found it manageable to improve on their existing drafts and they were thrilled when they arrived at their 'A-ha' moments.

Figure 3: STAR

S (Substitute)	T (Take things out)	A (Add)	R (Rearrange)
Replace: • overused words • weak verbs with strong verbs • weak adjectives with strong adjectives • common nouns with proper nouns • "dead" words	Take out: • unnecessary repetitions • unimportant or irrelevant information • parts that might belong in another place	Add: • detail • description • new information • figurative language • development • clarification of meanings • expanded ideas	Rearrange: • the sequence to produce a desired effect • the order for a more logical flow

Our Reflections

Doreen: The time I spent discussing and sharing ideas on how to establish a writing culture in my classroom with my SIG members has been a valuable learning experience for me. Not only did I learn, relearn and innovate new ways to enthuse my students to write, I also looked at my own pedagogy for the teaching of writing. The process has enabled me to be more systematic and effective in my teaching.

Leslie: The inquiry journey has allowed me to probe deeper into my students' learning - especially what worked for each ability grouping. I have conducted Master Classes for the entire P6 level and shared with my colleagues research-based strategies to engage their students. Besides that, the friendship forged in this professional network is valuable. We could bounce off ideas and experiences with one another to enhance ourselves professionally.

Shanti: Our students were at the centre of all that we did. Our SIG gave us the opportunity to learn how to make writing a pleasure for the students as well as to help our students become better writers. In addition to the satisfaction that we derived from seeing the improvement in our students' writing, we also derived great satisfaction from our professional interactions with one another. We learnt so much from one another. SIG meetings were something we looked forward to and the invaluable friendship we had forged grew deeper and stronger with every sharing and presentation that we did as a team. Now that our SIG's journey into exploring the teaching of writing has ended, I am extremely excited about our SIG's new foray into understanding the teaching of reading.

Bing Sum: The conversations that we have had were enriching. We shared teaching strategies and discussed how we could use them to make writing lessons engaging and effective. We also gathered student artefacts and found data analysis sessions insightful. It was always rewarding to see our students develop their authorial voice. I have certainly gained much from learning alongside my SIG members and am grateful to the guidance given by Prisca.

Conclusion

What began as an urgency to address the writing challenges our students faced and to prepare them for the new PSLE assessment format, resulted in rich learning for our team. Through this inquiry, we realised the importance of teaching writing as a process and the need to equip our students with the necessary skills to write effectively.

References

Gallagher, K. (2006). *Teaching adolescent writers.* Portland, Maine, USA: Stenhouse Publishers.

Peha, S. (1995). *Teaching that makes sense.* Carrboro, NC: TTMS. Retrieved September 28, 2016 from http://www.ttms.org/

ELiS