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MULTICULTURALISM AND MALAYSIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The definition of multiculturalism often invites controversies regarding self-represen-tation, including in the representation of other cultures. Gayatri C. Spivak, in an interview about the definition of multiculturalism, asserts the importance of problematising the notions of tokenism and representation, because "[tokenism] forces us all into positions in which we are distanced both from dominant ideology and from our own cultural heritage." Issues relating to multiculturalism are seen as important aspects in the construc-tion of national identity. Thus, we read children's literature as one of the cultural sites through which to understand how cultural representation is conceived by these writers and the kind of multiculturalism captured in such works. This paper explores the defini-tion of multiculturalism in relation to the problematics of the notions of tokenism and cultural representation in selected Malaysian Children's Literature in English. The paper also considers implications of these problematics on classroom practice, particularly in teachers' choice of classroom texts.

Introduction

Mahathir Mohamad (2002), at a US-ASEAN Business Council Dinner in Washing-ton DC, boldly compared the US and Malaysian multicultural experiences. He stated that

> *The United States and Malaysia have many things in common, much more than most people realise. We share a common history, language, many of our values, goals and even challenges.... America's welcome mat for the oppressed people of other countries has made it a melting pot of multiethnicity and multiculturalism upon which you built a prosperous, powerful and forward-looking nation. Malay-sia too attracted immigrants to our shores. And today our people are made up of indigenous Malays, descendants of Chinese, Indians and other migrants living together in peace and a climate of tolerance and mutual respect. Our diversity, like yours, is the basis of our strength.*

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The metaphor of America as a 'melting pot' boosts the image of America as a nation with a dynamic blend of ethnicity, religions, and cultures that contributes somewhat to a sense of 'American exceptionalism', or the belief that America is excepted from the contradictions faced by, and the forces acting upon, the rest of the world (Jacobs, 2004). This metaphor as perceived by Mahathir Mohamad can be extended to the Malaysian experience as "a relatively peaceful multi-religious and multiethnic society" (Alamgir Hussain).

The historical existence of a multicultural society is assumed to construct an ideological definition of Malaysian*ness*, manifested through the construct of *Bangsa Malaysia*, proposed by Mahathir in order to create a more multicultural national identity. Nevertheless, the current Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Abdul Razak, in responding to the continuing polemics on *Bangsa Malaysia*, conversely asserted that " 'Bangsa Malaysia' had nothing to do with the Constitution or national policies, but was related to an individual state of mind" (*The Star,* 7 November, 2006). Similarly, America's model of 'multiculturalism' through the 'melting pot' has been fraught with controversies and is continuously debated, mainly because it represents the 'standard' favoured by the proponents of assimilation. Going by the metaphor of the 'melting pot', assimilation would then involve the forging of diverse ethnicities and cultures into a single national 'alloy'. This would mean, then, that not only the products of this 'melting pot' would be culturally indistinguishable, but also that natives, along with their indigenous cultural characteristics, would be irrevocably altered (Salins, 1997). In an academic context, D'Souza (1991) cautions against the tendency towards multiculturalism in American universities, exemplified by ethnic-based programmes such as Black Studies, which inadvertently may threaten to displace the universalistic attitudes that traditional American education tried to foster. Where Malaysia is concerned, its model of multiculturalism has also been much debated in relation to its compatibility with the American model, given Malaysia's international identity as an Islamic nation. Mohamad Aslam Ahmad (2006) argues that the status of Islam as the official religion of the state would likely be challenged by proponents of Western multiculturalism because they conceive Islam as an intolerant religion, and one incapable of establishing its own social-political order in promoting national unity. In response, Ng Kam Weng (2006) is of the opinion that in a country like Malaysia, the issue of pluralism is best addressed through a brand of multiculturalism that addresses issues relating to religious and cultural diversity.

The arguments above demonstrate the complexity in addressing multiculturalism as a *modus operandi* for a multicultural nation like Malaysia,

and also that as a definition, it is fraught with tension. Given the problematics of the term, it is necessary for those who are involved in the educational curriculum to understand its definitions which are rooted in the West, and to understand it in relation to the local Malaysian context and its applications.

Defining Multiculturalism in Society

The notion 'multiculturalism' must first be clarified as it is a contested term. Sneja Gunew (2005: 667) states that "it is crucial to continue to scrutinise the discourses and practices mobilised in the name of multiculturalism." Generally, multiculturalism may be considered as a response to minority needs, a reference to an ideology that gives equal status to each cultural group that exists in a particular country. In the United States, multiculturalism refers to the "movement in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to disrupt the cultural homogeneity of the educational and literary canon by including the viewpoints of minority and international authors" (Mackey, 2005: 666). The making of a nation's education more inclusive is also made complicated by multiculturalism's opponents, whose defence of Western high culture excluded women and minority writers. Charles Taylor (1992) claims that "his version of 'recognition' deems that we should not assume that all cultures are equal but that we should give all cultures the 'presumption' that they can provide something of value." The contention that some cultures are superior or greater than others leads to questions relating to the evaluation of what may be considered of value to the existing nation's culture. In clarifying this, Susan Wolf (1994) asserts that Taylor's defence of the valued contribution refers to "valuable aesthetic or intellectual contribution" (ibid.). Taylor's limited definition attempts at ensuring a more internalised (intellectual attachment) multiculturalism rather than a superficial one.

The significance of this term is observed through the social policy of various countries for different reasons since the 1970s. Countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States of America have specific national policies that relate to issues related to multiculturalism. In Canada, for example, the French-speaking minority's grievance in Quebec has helped establish a national policy on bilingualism and biculturalism which bear multicultural elements (Oliver, 2001). Other than Canada, Australia has also adopted Canadian-style multiculturalism with the establishment of the Special Broadcasting Service which acknowledges the presence of other cultures (Madina, 1995). For the United States, the concept of the 'melting pot' is seen as an assimilation device for immigrants, and that multiculturalism is not made into any federal or state policies but is a more open

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application (Frost, 2006). The multicultural policies of the United States are observed to include the following: recognition of multiple citizenship; government support for newspapers, television, and radio in minority languages; support for minority festivals, holidays, and celebrations; acceptance of traditional and religious dress in schools, the military, and society in general; support for music and the arts from minority cultures; and programs to encourage minority representation in politics, education, and the work force.

Both the "Melting Pot" model and the Canadian style multiculturalism have been identified by Diane Ravitch as pluralistic and particularist. Ravitch explains that "pluralistic multiculturalism views each culture or subculture in a society as contributing unique and valuable cultural aspects to the whole culture. Particularist multiculturalism is more concerned with preserving the distinctions between cultures" (cited in Frost, 2006). Since Mahathir Mohamad has made a clear comparison between the Malaysian multicultural experience with that of the United States, it is thus necessary to include criticisms against the metaphor of the 'melting pot'. For instance, the metaphor is seen as an assimilation process only for European immigrants, not US-born black people. Through such an ethnically bound assimilation process, there exists an American national identity which values 'symbolic patriotism' above all else, when in reality the patriotism of minorities, specifically those of the blacks, is more likely to rest between the poles of 'invested patriotism' and 'iconoclastic patriotism', both ideologically opposed to 'symbolic patriotism'. 'Invested' patriotism is teleological, in the sense that a minority group believes in an idealistic end (i.e. racial equality) to the toil of previous generations of minorities; while 'iconoclastic' patriotism is a love for the country that is contingent upon vital transformations in "traditional interpretations, identities and practices" (Shaw). Thus the metaphor of the 'melting pot' has led to an 'Americanised' identity which subsumes the cultural identity of the migrants, leaving only superficial traces of the culture of the migrants' country of origin, "because they constituted the base material of the melting-pot" (Salins, 1997). Some, such as sociologist Horace Kellen, have argued that the 'melting pot' is not only unrealistic, but harmful because it leads to the attrition of a group's cultural identity, and prefers instead 'cultural pluralism', in which national policy would enable each group to attain "cultural perfection…proper to its kind" (Kellen). Those who share this view provide the now popular metaphor of the 'tossed salad' in place of the 'melting pot', with the individual ingredients of that 'salad' intermingling, but never losing their identity. The presence of multiculturalism in Southeast Asian countries may also be read as one that recognises the cultural inheritance…[through] multicultural …festivals, including cuisine [which] is pro-

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moted for locals to provided points of community identification and for tourists as 'instant Asia' or 'truly Asia'; on the other hand, the very presence of racial and ethnic *differences* [our emphasis] is treated as a potential source of tension and social disruptions that require constant surveillance by the policing apparatus of the state [in order] to maintain 'racial harmony (Chua, 2002).

Malaysia's communal identification through cultural festivals and commemoration ceremonies are more 'symbolic' of cultural harmony which eclipses the ideological multicultural presence, in the sense that this emotionally/internally attached sense of community is differentiated from external displays of behaviours.

Multiculturalism and National Identity in Malaysia

When used in reference to Malaysia, the metaphor of the 'melting pot' seems to promote the kind of particularist multiculturalism which forms the unique cultural identity of each ethnic group. The Malaysian sense of multiculturalism can be compared to the experience of other cultural groups in the United Kingdom who are allowed to "preserve their culture, while participating as citizens – that is, integrating without assimilating" (Frost, 2006). Furthermore, the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that respect for the British heritage is among the essential values belonging to the British:

> *When it comes to our essential values – belief in democracy, the rule of law, toler-ance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage – then that is where we come together, it is what we hold in common (in Johnston 2006).*

The essential values of the Malaysian *Rukun Negara* (Pillars of National Philosophy) may be considered as essential principles which work to unite the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Other ways of showing unity in Malaysia can be seen through the promotion of joined festivals such as *Deepa-Raya* (when Deepavali and Hari Raya coincide) and *Kongsi-Raya* (when Chinese New Year and Hari Raya coincide). Furthermore, the Malaysian government has allowed other minority languages' vernacular education, such as the Chinese medium schools and the Tamil medium schools as evidence of the inclusiveness of Malaysian multiculturalism.

The descriptive nature of multiculturalism in Malaysia, which refers strictly to the multiracial makeup of society, and not any multicultural ideology or defini-tion, informs us of the ethnic relations that exist in Malaysia. The 1957 Malayan Constitution and the 1963 Malaysian Constitution acknowledged the rights of

immigrant groups by granting them citizenship, while recognising the special rights of the Malays and other indigenous groups as the natives of the land. However, national policies such as the New Economic Policy (NEP) have raised national concerns in terms of the economic status and rights of non-Malays and Malays. Historically, political parties in Malaysia have been organised along racial lines, and when race riots in 1969, after the general election results appeared to threaten Malay political dominance, the 'necessary' dominance, politically and economically, of the Malays in their own 'homeland' was entrenched institutionally in the NEP. Racial quotas which privileged Malays were imposed on the allocation of places in universities, and jobs in the civil service, as well as the allocation of government contracts, shares of government-owned companies, and preferential bank loans for businesses and consumption. Such privileging of the Malays is, inevitably, disadvantaging the other races. In this sense, after 1969 until now, neither group nor individual equality applies in all government controlled sectors (Chua, 2002). The 'melting pot' metaphor may also be observed in the implementation of the National Cultural Policy in 1970 which aimed towards the assimilation of the non-Malays into the Malay ethnic group. In the 1990s, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad resisted such ethnocentric policies by introducing a more inclusive nation-state identity, a Malaysian rather than Malay construction of the nation. This was the *Bangsa Malaysia* policy, emphasising a Malaysian instead of Malay identity for the state, referring to the Malaysian nation as one that speaks the national language and is recognisably Malaysian in its identity.

The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) President, Ong Ka Ting, in commenting on the Malaysian identity promoted within the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*, refers to the "*rakyat* [nation of] Malaysia spirit [and the belief that]… [n]o race will be deprived of its original identity, culture, religion, language, and traditional practices" (*The Star*, 7 November 2006). Thus the Malaysian brand of multiculturalism may be seen to be characterised along racial lines, and that 'citizenship' policy and 'Bumiputra' policies have confined the cultural groups in their own ethnic boundaries (Chua, 2002).

The term multiculturalism may be seen as a response to a homogeneous culture (in other words, one that is monocultural). This monoculturalism, according to Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1991), refers to the original definition of nation-states, as "imagined political communit[ies]… inherently limited and sovereign", which is rooted in the nineteenth century recognition of a singular culture and identity in order for the country to gain sovereignty, which then defines the power of a nation. A particularist multiculturalism which

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refers to the act of preserving cultural differences in a way may weaken the power of the nation-state, thus an eclectic means to maintaining power is by framing the concept of multiculturalism through a pluralistic one, that is, ensuring that the subcultures contribute to the one main culture that represents the nation-state. The unstable meaning of multiculturalism vacillates between the pluralistic and particularist. These definitions are seen to have an influence on the nature of multicultural education, particularly in the study of multicultural literature.

Multicultural Literature and Some Guidelines in Indentifying Multiculturalism in Children's Books

The above discussion identifies the problematics of multiculturalism. We may observe that the major contention of multiculturalism is to establish justice in relation to recognising the racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and gender differences of people in a society. The above-mentioned categories relate to "the issue of difference which is a moral [one], involving questions of privilege and power." (Pugh, 2000: 4). At the curriculum level, when analysing the presence of elements of multiculturalism, we oftentimes have to address cultural differences in the multicultural classroom, and the texts and the process itself have involved sensitive issues that may affect racial and religious sensitivities. Aldridge *et al*. (2000) point out some major misconceptions about multiculturalism such as the fact that people always assume that language and cultural values are shared by those who use a common language, and who live within the same culture. Another major misconception is that books on cultures are usually authentically represented.

The controversy on multiculturalism in the social reality of a nation has much influenced the textual framework applied to the representation of multiculturalism in literature. As stated earlier, the various definitions may influence the notion of multicultural literature (Cai, 2003: 269). Cai (2003) revisits the various definitions of multiculturalism which influence the definition of multicultural literature understood within American society. We find that these definitions are commonly applied by those who are outside of the United States. One of the many contentions that create the controversy of multicultural literature is the inclusion of subcultures in representing a multiracial nation. William Safire's (1941) historical tracing of the term multiculturalism has associated it with the concept of "nationalism, national prejudice and behaviour" (Smith, 1993). These abstract terms are manifested as aspects of representation of the nation's cultural identity, taken to refer to a community's "undisturbed existential possession…benefit of traditional long dwelling, [and] continuity with the past" (Tomlinson, 1999).

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Smith (1993) further explains that the notion of multiculturalism has been extended to include marginalised groups, or those outside the mainstream such as persons with disabilities and homosexuals. Thus, multicultural literature which is based on these arguments must consider representations not only based on racial differences, but also of various lifestyles of contemporary society. If western multicultural ideology becomes the premise of Malaysian multicultural literature, such considerations must not be neglected.

Issue of Tokenism in Multicultural Literature

Cai (2003: 271) posits that "multiculturalism means inclusion of multiple cultures and therefore multicultural literature is the literature of multiple cultures. They believe that the more cultures covered, the more diverse the literature, and that both the under-represented and the mainstream cultures should be included." This view has led to the notion of tokenism which refers to selecting aspects/traits of a person's culture or race to be representative of that particular culture. The notion of tokenism is based on the history of representing minority groups in multicultural central institutions, as stated in the interview between Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sneja Gunew (Spivak and Gunew, 1993: 193).

Charles Taylor's concerns for 'high culture' elements in multiculturalism relate significantly to Spivak's definition of tokenisation. She asserts that "tokenisation goes with ghettoisation" which refers to the 'silenced' presence of oneself (Spivak and Gunew, 1993: 196). Tokenisation may be read not only as privileging one's cultural or racial presence, but also at the same time it may refer to negative meanings which lie in the cultural/racial stereotypes that mark subtle racism or oppression. Fang *et al.* (2003) assert that writers who resort to stereotypical images and erroneous cultural information are those writing outside their culture (p. 286). In our eagerness to include all cultures in our presentation of multicultural literature, we may have indirectly promoted an uncritical way of presenting others' cultural identities or given less attention to cultural and historical authenticity. In other words, writing as an outsider may lead to tokenisation, the process of othering or 'otherness'. Multicultural literature, which is responsible for representing fairly aspects of different cultures runs the risk of constructing the image of the 'Other.' For example, when a marginalised group of women are represented by feminists, the marginalised group is naturally put in a fixed position as the 'Other' when others (i.e. the feminists) speak for them. The process of othering is clearly demonstrated by Syed Hussien Al-Attas in his book the *Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977). His analysis demonstrates how Malays are captured

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through the eyes of orientalists as naturally lazy. The process of ghettoisation perpetuates negative or romanticised images of the culture which is perceived to be in an inferior position.

Issues relating to cultural and historical authenticity have become major concerns in the study of multicultural literature. Earlier, we pointed out that multicultural literature has become a space to give voice to minorities. For example, "multicultural books about minorities are written predominantly by European American authors from an outsider's perspective" (Reimer, 1992). Fang *et al.* (2003) further explain that most European American children's literature writers are influenced by the dominant cultural frame or the dominant Eurocentric ideology which is imbued with, in Edward Said's terminology, orientalism or imperialist mentality (p. 285). There is also a tendency to consider multicultural literature as multiethnic literature which focuses on only one particular race such as the people of colour as the major category within this type of literature. Such treatment of multicultural literature has reduced multiculturalism as "racial essentialism", or fixed characteristics, that excludes many cultures from the concept of multiculturalism" (Cai, 2003: 273). It is clear, therefore, that multicultural education must not only include ethnic/racial issues but also gender and class/socioeconomic diversity (Strevy and Aldridge, 1994).

Other aspects that are not being given attention to in multicultural education are "equal opportunity in the school, cultural pluralism, alternative life styles, and respect for those who differ, and support for power equity among groups" (Sleeter and Grant, 1993). It is important to realise, however, that not all aspects of multiculturalism promoted in countries such as the United States are suitable for Malaysia's multi-religious contexts. The Islamic national identity given to Malaysia may be seen to be at odds with the Western notion of multiculturalism, as described above. General guidelines may be applied to evaluate the suitability of children's texts in order to encompass multiculturalism. One such example is the guidelines suggested by the Council of Interracial Books for Children in the United States which aimed to ensure non-bias in children's textbooks and storybooks. The guidelines include checking for stereotypes or tokenism, the story line; evaluating lifestyle such as "cute-natives-in-costumes syndrome" relationship between people; evaluating the notion of heroes and children's self-image, author's perspective, loaded words; and checking the copyright date (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Other than guidelines, we also need to be aware of the disputations against the existence of multicultural education in the United States when evaluating our own application of elements of multiculturalism. Some of the disagreements that

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critics have pointed out is that "[m]ulticultural education is just an excuse for those who have not made it in the American way" (Limbaugh, 1994), or that it is more suited "for older children who are less egocentric or ethnocentric." This, despite findings that "cultural understanding in one's first culture occurs early and is typically established by age 5" (Lynch and Hanson, 1998) and that "children learn new cultural patterns more easily than adults" (p. 25). Conversely, such resistance to multicultural education can thus be seen as itself 'egocentric' or 'ethnocentric'. From such contentions, we learn that multicultural classroom or education in Malaysia should not be a means for indoctrination, but should be a space for children to learn about themselves and about each other.

Concerns that the implementation of multicultural education will lead to loss of commonality (Swiniarski, Breitborde and Murphy, 1999) may be seen as natural since most people would identify with only one culture. However, the reality of an increasingly multicultural society must be accepted and addressed through education, and a "multicultural education can assist society in being more tolerant, inclusive, and equitable, recognising that the whole is rich with many contributing parts" (Ravitch, 1991/1992). Thus, the value of a multicultural education, particularly in a multicultural society such as Malaysia, cannot be emphasised enough in order to recognise the cultural diversity that exists and that children bring with them to school.

In this era of globalisation, the argument that there are not enough resources available for multicultural education is no longer persuasive, as there are now a plethora of sources which have emerged in the past ten years or so concerning cultural diversity (Aldridge *et al*., 2000), particularly in children's literature.

Reading Multiculturalism in Malaysian Children's Literature

Malaysian multiculturalism can be read through the abundance of children's literature available in the Malaysia market. We may also assume that Malaysian children, living in the context of Malaysian social reality, are familiar with different types of cultures and that reading books of people of other cultures should not be strange to them. By and large, Malaysian schoolchildren have already been exposed to the morals of cultural and religious diversity in their society. Through the classroom textbooks, we have discovered that morals related to racial harmony are highlighted by the presence or representation of major ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaysia. Many of the Malaysian children's textbooks are thus keen to capture the friendship established by these major ethnic groups in order to instil a sense of respect and cultural understanding amongst

these different races. Much of the textual framework of Malaysian children's literature adopts the western notion of multiculturalism which has been promoted in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. For example, multiculturalism such as the one in the United States encompasses the major ethnic groups that are politically and socially disenfranchised, namely, the African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans (Cai, 2003: 270).

Text 1: The Malaysian Children's Favourite Stories
For the purpose of discussion, we have selected a few children's texts which are available in Malaysian school libraries and in bookstores. *The Malaysian Children's Favourite Stories (*2004) consists of nine folktales and are described in the blurb of the book as follows:

> *Set in the lush and beautiful tropical country of Malaysia,* **Malaysian Children's Favourite Stories** *contains a fascinating selection of well-known Malaysian stories from the incredibly rich store of Malay legends and provides a glimpse of the flora and fauna of Malaysia, the exotic animals and of course, beautiful princesses and princes.*

The target audience for the book is the international reader outside of Malaysia. It aims at introducing folk traditions to these readers. Earlier, we have included some guidelines in evaluating the multicultural literature. Using Derman-Sparks's (1989) guidelines, the text, generally, has in many ways exoticised Malaysian culture through its description. As a text, it has highlighted Malaysian culture through stories of one ethnic group. Other cultures of Malaysia are assumed within the more dominant folk stories. By assuming Malay culture to represent Malaysia, the readers are exposed to inaccurate cultural and historical information. Malaysian literature is tokenised through dominant Malay cultural ideology, although the morals transcend ethnicities. Like other national folktales, these stories provide space for children to talk about moral values although they are culturally and historically rooted in Malay cultural contexts. Folktales, unlike contemporary children's literature, do not contain cultural and racial prejudices that need to be addressed. Perhaps, this book may be considered as a means to developing commonality in Malaysian social morality with values such as respect, intellectualism, critical thinking, and understanding nature.

Contemporary multicultural children's literature poses a different cultural complexity for Malaysian society. The books *A Wise Man* (2000), *Coral Bay Surprise* (2003), and *Everyone is Good at Something* (2003) are books selected by

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the Centre for Curriculum Development of Malaysia to be read by primary school children. The evaluation of these books are based on the guidelines given in *Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism* from The Council on Interracial Books for Children and *How to Tell the Difference* by Beverly Slapin and Doris Searle (1995). The guidelines consist of giving accurate general information such as historical information (close to readers' social reality) and settings; actual language use (translated works should convey the original content, not word-by-word interpretations); epithets which insult a particular race or ethnicity; exclusion of stereotypes or caricatures (men/women of European descent should not provide all the solutions); illustrations that convey readers' social reality; author does not exoticise cultural practices; appealing stories such as friendship, family, and school within and outside of a given culture; and treatment of difficult topics and presentation of complex issues from multiple perspectives.

Text 2: A Wise Man
A Wise Man (2000) is the story of a wise man who observed an injustice being done when a poor old man was accused by a stall owner of eating his food without paying. The old man, who only sat at the stall but did not eat the food, was being forced by the stall owner to pay. The wise man helped save the poor old man from having to pay by giving a fair solution to the problem, that because the poor old man only smelt the food, the stall owner should only get to listen to the coins jingling. Even though there was no name given to the wise man, the illustration indicates that he was a Malay man (wearing typical *kampong* clothes such as the Malay *sarong* and skullcap). The writer has used traditional folktale storyline to highlight aspects of local culture through its setting. Through a simplistic storyline, the story captures cultural stereotyping about bullies who are physically bigger than the ones being bullied. The story undermines the complexity of the nature of problem-solving thus pointing out that wisdom is only acquired by an old man who solves petty problems. Although the story has potential for discussion of complex issues such as the act of bullying and the meaning of wisdom, it remains outside young readers' social reality and grasp. Issues relating to bullies are more appealing to young adults and within the social reality of young readers rather than the meaning of wisdom of an old man.

Text 3: Coral Bay Surprise
Coral Bay Surprise (2003) is about a group of friends, Amir, Farid, Yasmin and Susan, who went to Pangkor Island on a holiday to enjoy the beauty of nature but found that they had to help clean it up as irresponsible visitors before them had

dumped rubbish everywhere on Coral Bay. This story problematises cultural and racial expectations. The story centres on very significant environmental concerns about beach pollution that should be given national attention. The highlight on environmental issue is enhanced by the friendship of these individuals from different ethnic groups. However, the racial identity of Susan is not revealed. By her name, Susan can be Indian or Chinese. This may lead to simplistic dichotomous race-relations such as 'Malay and non-Malay.' Some socio-cultural expectations of Malay or Malaysian are reflected in specific professions typified of Malays, such as policemen, and that they expected their children to be professionals such as engineers. Although highlighting an environmental topic is a good strategy in raising children's awareness of moral obligations to protect nature and the environment, the story presents mainstream Malaysians as a group of people who are dirty, insensitive, and ignorant of their environment. The story also problematises Malays as not being punctual and effective. Such portrayals of Malays tend to perpetuate imperialist or essentialist mentality of the Other, with their characteristics fixed in type.

Text 4: Everyone is Good at Something
In *Everyone is Good at Something* (2003), Ben, who was sad that he did not do well in his exams, saved himself and his friends during a school excursion by climbing out of the cable car and bravely pulling the rope needed in order for them to safely get out of the cable car. In the process, Ben found faith in himself, that he was also good at something, just like his mother said. A story of self-discovery is always significant for young readers. This story instils self-confidence in young readers and informs parent-child relations. This text presents general universal values rather than problematising multiculturalism. For example, the characters are not named according to local ethnic names but English names. The setting, although within the social reality of Malaysian readers, underestimates the potential of local race-relations. By centring on one dominant race (with the presence of English names), the story may not be a good space for its readers to discuss important issues related to complex racial issues such as inter-racial friendship at school. The conflict that is faced by Ben in terms of not being liked by his schoolmates is a crucial point for young readers. Stories on friendship appeal to readers and should be a space for young readers to understand important social reality and cultural history.

All three books which represent multicultural literature do not pay much attention to illustrations. Illustrations, according to the guidelines, play an important role in appealing to young readers. Through the evaluation of this small

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sample of Malaysian children's literature, we found that elements of multiculturalism are not major components of this genre. Multiculturalism is always assumed to be present in a multiracial society like Malaysia. This assumption still remains to be contested, and a clear definition of multiculturalism with respect to multicultural literature in Malaysia must be determined.

Implications for Classroom Practice

The exploration of the problematics of multiculturalism and the examination of the three texts reveal certain implications on classroom practice. First, that the multicultural reality of Malaysia must be used as resource through which students can learn to appreciate each other's similarities and differences. Multiculturalism should not be seen as a handicap for the society with homogenisation as the ultimate goal. Malaysianness, or to be Malaysian, should also be a part of discussions in the classroom through literature, as well as the more general aim of inculcating universal morality.

Second, it is important that among texts selected for classroom use, there must be those that celebrate students' differences, as well as enhance their unique similarities and identity as Malaysians. The selected texts must be evaluated for their representation of what it means to be Malaysian, and texts which show tendencies towards stereotypical representation of the different races must be avoided, unless they are used as points of discussion of the dangers of stereotypes.

Clearly, there is a need for more Malaysian writers to write our own children's literature and also imperative that criticism of children's literature is developed. Whilst we can be optimistic and say that there is still hope in that direction, we have to make do with what is available currently on the market. This means that in dealing with Malaysian children's literature, teachers must guide students in handling texts critically, so that the noble intention of a harmonious multicultural existence can be turned into reality.

Conclusion

The metaphor of the 'melting pot' was made as the point of departure for us in discussing the notion of multiculturalism and multicultural literature. The term exists within discussions of power relations in the context of sensitive categories such as race, gender and class. Multicuturalism is a term which highlights the significance of difference and counter-hegemonic acts of individuals in society in order to take them out of unjust social conditions. Gender, race and class tend to

be silenced issues. Multicultural literature must therefore, become the space for Malaysian readers to voice their views on these silenced issues, thus developing a healthy collective cultural production. Continuous controversies regarding self-representation make multiculturalism a problematic field but what is important is that as a society, Malaysians realise that multiculturalism is within the scope of discussion of cultural politics, and that it will be continually debated. Questions relating to synthesising ideological differences with respect to the notion – one rooted in Western ideology and the other in the local religious and cultural contexts – must therefore be considered.

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READING LITERARY TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the nature of literary texts and the need for students to be taught to read them in a manner which goes beyond literal comprehension of the texts. The writer advocates reading literary texts which allows for both cognitive processing of information and aesthetic appreciation. The writer provides a framework for reading literary literary texts using Barrett's taxonomy. A range of questioning strategies is discussed in relation to reading various literary texts taught in the Malaysian secondary school English language programme.

Introduction

The reading of literary texts is often a challenge in many second language class-rooms. Students need to understand the texts before they can experience or enjoy them. However, too often, it is another reading comprehension lesson in a language classroom (Vethamani, 2004). Students are usually given a list of questions that test students' literal comprehension of the text. In this article, I will discuss the nature of literary texts and how appropriate questioning strategies can be employed to go beyond mere literal comprehension of literary texts.

Nature of Texts

All of us are consciously or unconsciously readers. Daily, we read a range of texts and respond to them in a variety of ways. These texts can be anything from road signs, telephone directories, do-it-yourself instructions, newspaper articles, comics, textbooks, short stories or novels. The nature of these texts is not similar because of the purpose for which they have been written. Thus, the language employed by the writers would all be dissimilar. This difference in the nature of language has been effectively described as referential language and representational language (McRae, 1991). This broad distinction will serve the purpose of this article as it helps to provide teachers with a better understanding on how to approach the reading of texts in the language or literature classroom.

Referential language communicates information and it comprises transactional and interactional language forms (greeting, apologising, taking leave, in-

forming, etc) that are taught to students in the communicative language class-room. Referential language would work only on one level — the literal level. Its purpose is primarily to inform. Examples of referential language would be road signs, information in telephone directories, and language that is limited to every-day real life. It is language that is explicit and unambiguous. It operates mainly at the cognitive level.

Representational language, on the other hand, engages the readers' imagi-nation. It is implicit and often vague. Representational language would require the readers to use their imagination to arrive at the meaning of the text. It would require of the readers both an emotional and intellectual response to the text. The affective domain of the readers is stimulated and it provides the opportunity for personal response to and interpretation of the text. This will be illustrated in the activities provided in the later part of the article.

Reading for Different Purposes

Teachers also need to bear in mind that the purpose for reading maybe broadly categorised into efferent reading and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). Stu-dents need to know why they are reading. They could be doing efferent reading, that is, reading for information or they could be doing aesthetic reading, which is, paying attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that the words evoke (Vethamani, 2002; Gunning, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1978). As literature tea-chers, we are concerned with aesthetic reading. We are not concerned with our learners merely discovering literal meaning of words in the text, but with the students' personal response to the text. It is the interaction between student and text that should be of concern to us.

Reading Literary Texts

Bearing in mind the above distinction regarding the nature of language in literary texts, literature teachers need to remind themselves that it is representational language that they will be dealing with. As such, the reading tasks and activities should be geared towards dealing with such language. It cannot be denied that students need to understand the literal meaning of the text. However, it is just not enough to work at information level. To stop at this stage would mean that the lesson remains very much a reading comprehension lesson, no different from any other reading comprehension lesson in any language classroom.

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Lexis/Vocabulary

The tasks and activities in the literature classroom should require students to use their imagination, creativity, and interpretive ability. When dealing with lexis or vocabulary, teachers should encourage students to work out the meanings of words in the context that they are used. Dealing with denotative meaning or dictionary meaning should be kept to the minimal and more time should be spent on discussing the connotative meaning. Students should attempt to explore the writer's choice of words. Students need to examine the metaphorical meanings of the words. This will take them beyond literal meaning to literary interpretation of the text.

Students should not be made to feel satisfied just because they know the meaning of the words. They should study how the words work together effectively to convey the tone and meaning in the text. Exercises in substituting the writer's choice of words with synonyms would prove to be worthwhile to see if the effectiveness of the original word is retained, diminished or lost.

Teachers need to be continuously aware that literary texts comprise representational language. These texts should be viewed as open texts and therefore, there is room for multiplicity in meanings and interpretations. Teachers should not be dogmatic and expect students to provide 'correct' answers that the teachers have already formulated. Students should be allowed to explore the texts and respond to them through their own personal interpretations, which could be the result of their prior knowledge and experience.

Reading Literary Texts and Developing Critical Thinking Skills

Representational language in literary texts lends itself as an excellent means for developing the critical thinking skills of students. Reading tasks should require students to process the text by relating their linguistic ability (language proficiency and understanding of the elements of literature), knowledge of the world, and experience, to the text. Such activities will ensure that students do not just process meaning but go beyond literal meaning to using their critical and interpretive abilities.

The following diagram illustrates this. I will discuss the diagram further in the following sections.

Questioning Strategies

The questioning strategies of the literature teacher are also the key to unlocking the text to the students. Literature teachers should lead students from low-level

Reading Materials	Question Types	Barrett's Taxonomy	
Representational Materials	High order questions: divergent open-ended	5	Appreciation
		4	Evaluation
		3	Inferential comprehension
Referential Materials	Low order questions: convergent close-ended	2	Reorganisation
		1	Literal (comprehension)

Exploring Literary Texts (Vethamani, 1998)

questions, which merely require students to convey information to higher-level questions, which require students to interpret the texts This can be achieved by moving away from close-ended questions, which require literal or content information (as indicated in the diagram above). Teachers could start with these questions to ensure students have understood the first level of meaning. They should then go on to dealing with interpretive activities by using open-ended questions.

Using Barrett's Taxonomy Teaching Literary Texts

Barrett's taxonomy (Clymer, 1968) is very applicable for teaching literary texts as it takes into consideration not just the cognitive dimension but also the affective dimension that is an inseparable aspect in the study of literary texts (Tollesfeson, 1989). This taxonomy is divided into five skill categories: (1) literal comprehension, (2) reorganisation, (3) inferential comprehension, (4) evaluation, and (5) appreciation .

I shall provide a comprehensive overview of how this taxonomy can be utilised by the teachers. These five categories are arranged in a hierarchical order of difficulty. While teaching a text, the teacher will have to decide how much time he would require for each category. For certain texts, the teacher may decide to go straight into inferential comprehension because he may consider the text relatively easy for his students. For another, he may have to spend more time at the literal level so that students have a sound understanding of the basic information in the text.

At the first level of literal comprehension, the focus is largely on the students' ability to recognise and recall explicit information. Most of the activities and tasks at this level would revolve around locating, identifying and recalling the relevant information. These activities and tasks are obviously of a low cognitive level but are still essential to the understanding of the texts. Activities and tasks for literal comprehension are broadly divided into recognition and recall subcategories. These activities require students to recognise and recall details, main ideas, a sequence, comparison, cause and effect relationships, and character traits. Below are some examples.

Example 1: Identifying Details
Read the poem, 'There has been a death in the opposite house' by Emily Dickinson and complete the table below. Some of the boxes have been completed for you.

People Mentioned in the poem	What they do
Neighbours	Rustle in and out
Doctor	
Someone	
	Hurry by the house
The persona (when a young boy)	
Minister	Walks into the house
	Comes to the house
(the man of the appalling trade)	
(dark parade)	Come to pay respect and for the funeral

Example 2 Recognise and Recall Details
   Write true or false next to the statements about the poem.
   There has been a death in the opposite house.   _____
   The people are crying loudly.   _____
   People do things to help the family of the dead.   _____
   Nobody seems to care about the dead person.   _____
   People are informed of the death by the local newspapers.   _____
   Children seem to be afraid of going near the house   _____
     of the dead person.
   There is a party for the neighbours.   _____
   People who have work to do for the funeral arrive.   _____
   People come in buses to watch the funeral.   _____
   People seem to be moving about and the only person
     who is still is the dead person.   _____

     At the second level of reorganisation, students are required to analyse, synthesise, and organise the information that is explicitly stated. At this level, students still work with explicit information and are not required to do any interpretation. The tasks and activities for this level include the following: classifying, outlining, summarising and synthesising. To carry out these tasks and activities, students could be required to quote statements from the texts, paraphrase or even translate the writer's statements. For example, in a synthesising task, students could be instructed to consolidate explicit ideas or information from different characters regarding an incident they were all involved in. Below are more examples from Muhammad Haji Salleh's 'Si Tenggang's Homecoming'.

Read the following stanza carefully.

vi
i am not a new man,
not too different
from you;
the people and cities
of coastal ports
taught me not to brood,
over a foreign world
suffer difficulties
or fear possibilities.

i am you,
freed from the village,
its soil and ways,
independent, because
i have found myself.

List four things the persona says about himself. The first has been done for you.

The persona is not a new man.

_____
_____
_____

Complete the paragraph below using the words from the sentences in the earlier exercise and ideas from the stanza given above.

The persona is not a 1. _____ man. He is not very 2. _____ from the other Malays. He has 3. _____ from his travels not to 4. _____ too much over difficulties. He is just 5. _____ the other Malays but he is now 6. _____ from the village and is 7. _____. He has 8. _____ himself.

At the third level, inferential comprehension, students exhibit their ability to utilise explicit information from texts and their intuition and experience to make hypotheses and conjectures. At this level, students' reading needs to be supported by teachers' questioning to help them draw upon their imagination and to lead them beyond the printed page. The inferencing activities for the above purposes can be carried out for inferring: supporting details, main ideas, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect relationships, character traits, outcomes, figurative language.

Below are examples of questions that lead to inferencing questions. Read the following lines from *Monsoon History* from Shirley Lim.

A. List the insects/creatures that are mentioned in the following lines.

The air is wet, soaks
Into mattresses, and curls
In apparitions of smoke.
Like fat white slugs furled

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Among the timber,
Or silver fish tunnelling
The damp linen covers
Of schoolbooks, or walking
Quietly like centipedes,
The air walking everywhere
On its hundred feet
Is filled with the glare
Of tropical water.

              ...

Reading Tennyson, at six
p.m. in pajamas,
Listening to down-pouring
rain: the air ticks
With gnats, black spiders fly,
Moths sweep out of our rooms
Where termites built
Their hills of eggs and queens zoom
In heat.

Creatures mentioned:
Example:

fat white slugs

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

B. Pick out two creatures mentioned in the lines that are used as comparisons (Hint: look for the word "like" which appears before the creatures). State what the creatures are compared to.

(_____are compared to _____)

_____are compared to _____

C. Now write down what you think these comparisons could imply?

_____
_____
_____

The fourth level of evaluation requires the setting of tasks and activities for students which would require them to compare ideas and issues in the text with sources of information outside the text. Students are required, to make evaluation or judgment on matters related to accuracy, acceptability, worth, and even the probability of occurrence.

       Below is an example of questions at the evaluation level for Rudyard Kipling's *IF*. Students are required to read the following stanza and answer the questions that follow.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
    Or walk with Kings- nor lose the common touch
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you
      If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
    With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it:
    And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Why do you think time is described as 'unforgiving'?

_____
_____
_____

Do you think that it is possible to follow the persona's advice in this stanza? Why do you say so?

_____
_____
_____

The final and fifth level of appreciation deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the text on students. It requires students to utilise all the cognitive dimensions listed above and requires of the students an emotional response to the aesthetic and artistic elements in the texts. The tasks for this level require an emotional response to the content, identification with characters or incidents, reactions to the writer's use of language and imagery. Below are examples of questions that lead towards the appreciation level.

Read the following lines from Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18* and answer the questions that follow.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

1. Who do you think 'thee' is in line 1?

    _____

2. What is 'thee' compared to?

    _____

3. Why do you think the persona makes this comparison?

    _____

4. Do you think the comparison is an effective/appropriate comparison?
   Why do you say so?

    _____

    _____

The questions should move from literal questions to inferential questions to questions related to learners' appreciation of the texts.

I will now show how a poem can be taught for mere reading comprehension and then how it can be drawn further into a meaningful literature lesson which incorpo-

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rates the different levels of Barret's taxonomy. Wordsworth's poem, *She Dwelt Among Th' Untrodden Ways* will be used to this purpose.

She dwelt among th' untrodden ways	1
Beside the springs of Dove,	
A maid whom there were none to praise	
And very few to love.	
A Violet by a mossy stone	5
Half-hidden from the Eye!	
Fair, as a star when only one	
Is shining in the sky!	
She liv'd unknown, and few could know	
When Lucy ceas'd to be;	10
But she is in her Grave, and Oh!	
The difference to me.	

The questions below could be asked in a literature lesson that remains at the literal reading comprehension level.

Question 1 : Provide the meanings of the following words:
dwelt, untrodden, maid, mossy, and ceas'd.
Question 2 : Where did the girl live?
Question 3 : What is she compared to?
Question 4 : What has happened to her?
Question 5 : What is the name of the girl referred to in line 1?

The above questions do little to engage the reader with the poem. Students do not get the opportunity to interact with the text on a personal level or make any interpretation. The reading of the text in a literature lesson could be drawn to a higher level by using the questions and activities given below.

Activity 1
Answer the following questions.

Who is the 'She' referred to in line 1?
Why do you think the writer did not mention her by name in line 1?
Would it have made any difference if he had? Why do you say so?

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Activity 2
1. Complete the table below about what you know and do not know about the girl in the poem.

Things you know about the girl	Things you do not know about the girl

2. Why do you think the writer is silent about some information about the girl?

3. What effect does this have on you?

Activity 3
Understanding comparisons. Answer the following questions.

What is Lucy compared to?
Which is a simile? Why do you say so?
Which is a metaphor? Why do you say so?
What do the comparisons tell you about the persona's perception of Lucy?
Do you think the comparisons are effective? Why?

Activity 4
Making inferences. Answer the following questions.

What is your perception of Lucy? Why do you say so?
What kind of relationship do you think existed between the persona and
    Lucy? Support your view with appropriate references from the poem.
What would be a possible theme in this poem? Give textual reference to
    support your choice.
Pick out words in the poem that could suggest the tone in the poem.

Activity 5
The following activity can be used as a post-reading activity to examine the poem.

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Students first work in groups and then share each group's discussion as a whole class activity. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts and views with members of their groups.

Discuss the following questions:

Do you think there can be such relationships today as the one in the poem? Why do you say so?
Imagine that a friend or a relative of yours is in the same position as Lucy (before her death). You find out about the persona's love for her. What would you do? Why?
Have you read any other poem or short story with a similar theme? Inform the group about it. Which do you prefer? Why?
How has the Internet changed some of the ways people meet nowadays? Is the situation in the poem now more unlikely to happen?

Conclusion

In this article, the nature of the language in literary texts was the focus. In view of this, I have suggested that teachers carry out appropriate activities that take lessons which at the literal level move towards interpretation of literary texts. This will also enable students to not just understand texts but also experience and enjoy them at a personal level.

The questioning strategies and activities suggested in this article are some ways of reading a text in greater depth and making some interpretations, comparisons, inferences, evaluation and appreciation. These activities will help our students go beyond literal comprehension of the text.

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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The value of reflection in education has long been recognised, particularly by Schon (1987), who revitalised the concept of reflection in today's educational setting. Reflective practice helps teachers, including ESL teachers, reach a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and efforts and, ultimately, attain greater effectiveness as a teacher. However, the manner and quality of reflection is not always looked into so that it can be of greatest benefit to teachers. This paper considers two tools or models that can help teachers engage in deeper levels of reflection and reach greater awareness of themselves. Moon's (1999) Two-stage Model and Scharmer's (2007) Presencing Model may be used as toolkits by language teachers to think about what they are doing, and to actively work towards improving their professional growth.

Introduction

How classroom practices can be captured to enable teachers to make sense of their own beliefs and practices about what constitutes good teaching, to acknowledge and validate what they are learning and to achieve a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher, has been in the forefront of research on teacher development for decades. A review of current research indicates that reflection has become a popular tool for improving teaching practice, and as a way to help teachers record and capture their work. However, Barnett (1997) is concerned with the quality of reflection that is taking place among teachers. Moon (1999b) points out a similar concern where the focus of reflection is to specify a desired outcome or improvement. In many cases, however, this improvement is rarely mentioned. This suggests that most practioners are reflecting at the surface level which affects the quality of the learning experience. Van Manen (1991) and Moon (1999b) believe that teachers should take reflection to a reflective or mindful stance which links thought and action in relationship between self and others. The writers believe this relationship can be achieved by reflecting on or about a problem, our actions, the actions of others and possible solutions in order

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to produce a positive outcome. By doing so, teachers will get into a relationship with the issue and reflect at the deeper level.

Recognising the value of reflection to illustrate teaching experiences, teachers – including language teachers – are encouraged to document their efforts in teaching portfolios as a means for self-evaluation and improvement. It is believed that reflective practice can spur teachers to think consciously about what makes their teaching effective, what worked and what did not and more importantly, the how's and the why's. According to Ferraro (2000), if reflection becomes a common practice among teachers, it creates a climate in which discussion of teaching–and thus teaching itself–can flourish. Reflective practice can be a beneficial process in teacher professional development, both for pre-service and in-service teachers. This paper reviews the concept, benefits and practical steps for reflecting based on Moon's model and Scharmer's (2007) 'Presencing' theory – an expansion of Kolb's (1984) learning cycles on reflection and action.

Reflective Practice

The value of reflection has long been recognised by Schon (1987) who revitalised the concept of reflection in today's educational setting. He theorised that reflection is an educational practice that helps us to articulate our prior knowledge with confidence and certainty. Prior knowledge and skills are part of our credible selves that exist to assist us but are somehow hidden when we try to retrieve them to explain to others. This often happens when pre-service and in-service teachers are asked to express their thoughts or to explain how they achieved a particular outcome. Reflective practice trains them to thoughtfully consider their own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while looking at possibilities to inspire their teaching experiences and to bring about positive outcomes from their teaching efforts. According to Schon (1998), reflective practitioners are individuals who constantly 'think about the doing', and who actively, carefully and constantly work towards improving their professional growth.

In line with this view, teaching portfolios can become a common and useful tool for teachers to think about what they are doing and to track their own personal development. Such portfolios can help language teachers reflect on the approaches and materials they use, and to evaluate whether they were effective. Records can also help language teachers keep track of their own changing beliefs about language learners and language learning.

Stages of Reflection

Moon's (1999b) mapping of the various stages of reflection illustrate that earlier stages represent surface learning while the three later stages manifest forms of deeper learning. The 'deepest' stage involves "extensive accommodation to cognitive structure and learners demonstrate capability of evaluating their frames for references, the nature of their own and other people's knowledge and the process of knowing itself" (Moon, 1999a: 28). This process, according to Moon (1999b), "demands greater control over the working of cognitive structure and greater clarity in the processes of learning and representing that learning" (p.28). Reflective practice, therefore, makes it possible for teachers to be more active and motivated as they continuously collect and assess their own progress as they undergo the teaching experience. The following figure which is a simplified model of Moon's (1999b) descriptions of the various stages of reflection illustrates the reflective thinking process where educators draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences, become aware of their metacognitive processes, and take future actions to make learning more effective.

PURPOSE (PUR)

BASIC OBSERVATIONS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

REVISITING

STANDING BACK

MOVING ON
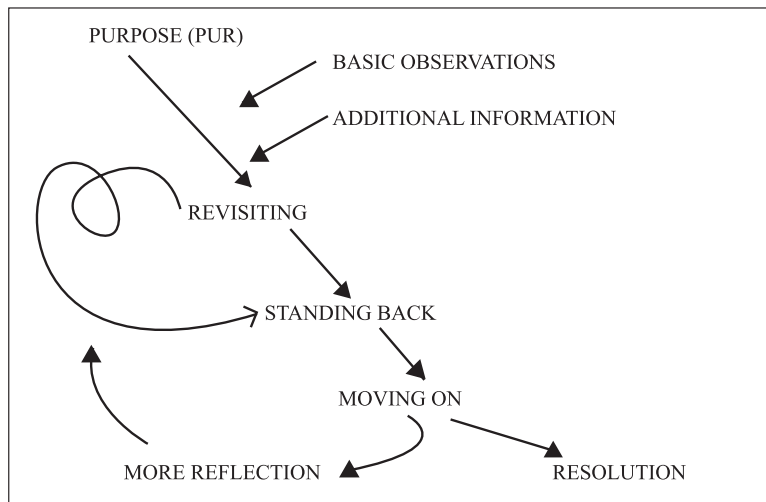
MORE REFLECTION

RESOLUTION

Figure 1: (Simplified Version of Moon's (1999b) model; King: 2002)

Moon's (1999b) model illustrates two levels comprising seven stages. The two levels are mediated by the cognitive structure and the quality of the representation of the learning is indicated by the number of descriptions of the best possible representations (BPR) that can be achieved at each of the stages.

The first level involves three stages that are introduced as the basic steps for later reflection. According to Moon (1999a), the stages represent the surface level of reflection where teachers try to make sense of the situation. At the surface level, ideas will not be properly integrated. This level begins with the stage of deciding on the 'purpose' for reflection. 'Basic observation' is the next stage which includes events or issues upon which reflection will occur. This would be the teaching methods or strategies employed, which require teachers to make general observations. Finally, 'additional information' involves new information obtained from other sources or from suggestions made by others.

The next level of reflection, which involves four stages, is where 'true reflection' or 'deep learning' occurs (King, 2002). This involves 'making meaning' in learning where the teachers process new material and are able to explain elements of it, as the material will be linked to the cognitive structure. This is called 'cognitive housekeeping' where teachers think things over until they achieve a better understanding, explore or organise the understanding towards a particular purpose or in order that it can be represented in a particular manner (Moon, 1999b: 139). This level begins with the stage of 'revisiting' where earlier reflections are reviewed, and there is a possibility for 'mulling over' issues and problems so that it is possible to look at an issue or event from a different perspective. She explains that learning is deepened when teachers rethink or reflect upon material that they have learnt at the surface level. Consideration can be given here to theorising and planning experiments or new actions. The stage of 'Standing Back' takes the reflection to a new level as the experiments or new actions are tested and the results are re-evaluated. New ideas go through a process of drafting and redrafting and the act of representing the material in the best possible form is a learning process (Moon, 1999a: 34).

'Revisiting' and 'Standing Back' are complementary stages that open windows of opportunities for teachers to develop their ability to synthesise and to fit new ideas into their existing schemata. They monitor and evaluate and decide on the plausible ways to make their teaching more effective. Here, teachers work on their portfolios by reflecting and rethinking what they have been doing and try to improve the quality of their teaching by evaluating and revising. This will eventually lead to the 'Moving On' or 'Resolution' stages of reflection to signify that something has

been learned and the teachers feel a sense of moving on. Further possibilities for reflection may be generated and the cycle of reflection will start again or a sense of accomplishment has been achieved at the end of the learning cycle (King, 2002).

Reflective practice requires one to actively think about one's actions as well as the consequences resulting from these actions. Teachers have to constantly think if the strategies derived as an outcome of their reflections will reap benefits for themselves as well as for their students. This active thinking process is triggered when the practitioner is engaged in problem solving situations or experimentation. The teacher is encouraged to apply theories that they have learned into practice within their own classrooms and to document reports of their experiences in their teaching portfolios. Teachers are also encouraged to analyse their teaching strategies with their colleagues and this collaborative model of reflective practice enriches teachers' personal reflections on their work and provides them with suggestions from peers on how to refine their teaching practices.

Reflective thinking has been closely associated with improved capacities for self-regulation as teachers become more aware of their own thinking as they think, write and solve problems. Moon (1999a) maintains that it is through reflection that practitioners begin to spend more time exploring why they acted as they did. Thus, they develop self-monitoring questions about the activities and get more involved in the teaching and learning process. This act of self-regulation through reflection encourages teachers to think and fully understand things before acting to avoid major problems. Therefore, teachers are totally engaged in self-development. In fact, reflective practice performed over a period of time can raise teacher's consciousness towards problem-solving and empower them to 'think and rethink' prior knowledge to generate new strategies for future possibilities.

Benefits of Reflective Practice

Reflection is a valuable skill or strategy to use in the learning process because it enhances teachers' insight and promotes their metacognitive awareness. Although reflection is considered an internal activity done in relative isolation, it is important to reflect with another person of your own level, who is learning with interest and appreciates your ideas and questions. Reflecting with a learning partner or partners about one's ideas and in the process receiving feedback about one's thinking is especially important for teacher development. Leong and Mardziah (2006) who studied the development of third-year student teachers found that the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching while modeling for them a collaborative

style of professional development that would be useful throughout their teaching careers. At the level of in-service teaching, studies have shown that critical reflection upon experience continues to be an effective technique for professional development (Ferraro, 2000). Therefore, effective teacher professional development should involve more than occasional large-group sessions; it should include activities such as study teams and peer coaching in which teachers continuously examine their assumptions and practices. In another study by Leong (2006), reflections that were performed in isolation did not possess the favourable conditions that engendered reflections at the deeper level. The findings support the use of a collaborative learning environment to trigger reflection as it offers opportunities for negotiation of meaning through peer discussions which paved the way for what Moon (1999b) calls 'cognitive housekeeping' to take place. Here, students evaluate and analyse all the views given and make cognitive decisions to either accommodate or reject the ideas. The study shows that a collaborative environment can propel reflective thinking to a higher level which encourages higher levels of metacognitive awareness. Through the use of reflection in a collaborative environment, we can learn to consciously make connections with prior and existing knowledge and plan the appropriate strategy to deal with the teaching process. Thus, Haneda and Wells (2000) maintain that where possible, opportunities should be provided for peer reviews to reflect on "work in progress or completed in order to make connections among topics researched and to encourage a metastance to the choice of goals and strategies" (p. 436).

Reflective practice, in general, is described as "a mode that integrates thoughts and action with reflection" (Imel, 1992: 95). In education, reflective practice is considered as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Only when teachers reflect whether through teaching portfolios, personal reflections or through action research, are they able to make sense of and extract meaning from their experiences.

In reflective practice, teachers are constantly engaged in a cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in their teaching efforts. Schon's (1988) concept of reflective practice helps teachers make sense of a method or a technique they perceive to be unique and retrieve existing knowledge or metaphors to act upon it. Smith (2001) believes that reflective practice encourages teachers to think and fully understand things before acting. Therefore, Moon (1999a) maintains that reflective practice needs to be structured accordingly to encourage teachers to "reflect on appropriate issues" and help them 'move on' in their reflection and their learning (p. 46). She argues that if teachers know the components that they are to reflect on, they are

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less likely to go around in circles and waste precious learning time reflecting on non-related issues.

On the other hand, reflective practice need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies. It can also help teachers redefine their attitudes towards teaching and learning and help them regenerate new feelings and new insights for self-improvement. Reflective practice can offer teachers an opportunity to explore attitudes, develop management skills, and reflect on the ethical implications of practice in classrooms and encourage teachers to step back and critically reflect not only on how they teach, but also on why they teach in a particular way. ESL teachers who frequently point out students' errors in an explicit way may, for example, ask themselves if that is how they would like their own mistakes to be identified, or if they would prefer an alternative approach. Reflection also helps ESL teachers examine any underlying – and perhaps unrealised – bias towards particular students.

Reflective practice is one of the educational strategies that can be easily applied in any learning situation to enhance teachers' consciousness of their ability to seek solutions to solve an existing problem. Furthermore, they can also develop strategies to overcome similar problems in the future. Thus, the next section outlines an innovative technique to reflection adapted based on Scharmer's (2007) model on 'presencing' which is an expansion of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, moving back and forth between action and reflection. Based on the model, teachers may not be able to address teaching and learning problems using traditional practices. Instead, the model suggests that teachers need to begin by observing and immersing oneself into the context. Then they should retreat and reflect on prior knowledge. In the process, they need to question their purpose or intent for seeking solutions and the 'highest future possibility' which requires teachers to let go of past practices in order to see new and emerging ideas. When a new idea evolves, teachers must move into action quickly and act instantly. Face reflection will be used as a guide for students to reflect and record their reflections down via reflective journals.

A Presencing Model: Reflecting for Future Possibilities

Although reflective practice in essence is beneficial in self-development and self-improvement, not all reflection results in learning (Beatty, 2003; Herrington and Oliver, 2002; Jasper, 1999; McConnell, 1994). Scharmer (2007) laments that in all aspects of society, major change is needed, yet this needed change is not taking place. Instead, people tend to follow the same pattern of tackling problems or issues which produce results that are basically the same or that no one actually wants. He maintains that this sad state of affairs is because society as a whole

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tends to reflect on the past without bringing the future into the present. Scharmer (2007) calls this 'presencing'.

In like manner, teachers are often confronted with the same challenges and tackling the same issues with the same old practices as they tend to reflect on the past without future possibilities. Boud and Walker (1998) noted shortcomings in the way reflective practice has been applied in teacher education and development programs. They took issue with what they considered to be a 'checklist' or 'reflection on demand' mentality, reflection processes with no link to conceptual frameworks, a failure to encourage challenges to present teaching practices, and a need for personal disclosure that was beyond the capacity of teachers.

Therefore, in line with Scharmer's theory of 'presencing', these weaknesses can be addressed when teachers create a new mindset by building a context for reflection unique to every learning situation – by reflecting on the past and by bringing into the present all future possibilities so that they do not hold on tightly to past practices but quickly act on a positive idea that was developed to solve current problems.

Scharmer's (2007) theory on 'presencing' is an expansion of Kolb's (1984) "learning cycles – learning through reflecting on the past- through 'presencing', through the becoming-present of the highest future possibility." In applying Scharmer's theory into teacher development and the reflective process, his seven-step process is adapted in this chapter to enable teachers to re-invent their teaching practices, regenerate their attitudes towards their profession and to create new possibilities that bring about positive results.

A Tool-kit: A Practical Approach to Reflection

Schon (1998) advocates the use of practicum as a setting for good reflective practices where the pressures of normal practices are removed to enable better opportunities for deep reflection to occur. It is through reflection that we can come to a clearer sense of the values that underpin our work and of who we are as professionals. Reflection takes us back to meaning and purpose. Guided or structured reflection with the use of a cue question tool-kit offers teachers a more comprehensive and valid means of reflecting at the deeper level. It teaches us how we can be reflective practioners, which involves thinking about what we believe in and what we do. The following tool-kit integrates the stages of Moon's (1999b) Model and some of the principles of Scharmers' (2007) theory on 'presencing' to encourage teachers to view their teaching practices in a more socially-constructed manner and to develop solutions that are practical and effective for now and for future possibilities.

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Constructivism views learning as a process of embedding the target context which requires the kind of thinking that would be done in real life (Mardziah, 1998). Thus, this tool-kit offers teachers a practical approach to collaborate and problem-solve through the use of reflective practice, and it can be as easily applied to language teaching as it is to the teaching of other subjects.

Moon (1999b) reiterates that the cycle of reflection is one that encourages teachers to rethink and re-evaluate their teaching practices with the aim of self-improvement. The use of reflection enhances decision-making in professional education and practices and creates mindfulness to institute good teaching practices. According to Scharmer (2007) 'presencing' allows us to bring the future in to our present so that we create "spaces where people can reflect, sense, and then prototype and implement." It involves the will to let go of past practices and embrace new and innovative ways to problem-solve.

Conclusion

The tools and strategies for reflection explicated in this paper would be of benefit to teachers, regardless of their area or content of instruction. The primary benefit of reflective practice for teachers is a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher. Therefore, good teachers reflect effectively by letting go of their grip on the past and changing their set patterns. As explicated by Moon (1999b), teachers' self-development is only deepened when they acquire the ability to restructure what they have learnt at the surface level and when that happens, 'cognitive housekeeping' automatically occurs to facilitate their development to the next level. According to Moon (1999a) reflections are enhanced when ideas or thoughts are "represented in reflective discussions" (p. 26). Opportunities to reflect actively within an environment that allows them to discuss and challenge the ideas contributed by their peers amplifies the process of knowledge construction. Thus, reflection should not just remain at the level of 'reflection and action' but move towards the next level of 'future possibilities to enhance one's development and effectiveness in the teaching profession.'

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APPENDIX

Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
1. Intention	Bringing key players together and then develop strategic intent.	PURPOSE	Teachers in a school gather to reflect on present teaching and learning practices. Decide on a common teaching or learning problem that they face.	1. What teaching problem(s) am I facing now? 2. What problem(s) are my students facing now?
2. Core Group	A group that is 100% committed to the project. The group goes on 'deep-dive' journeys, immersing themselves in all the relevant contexts in order to cope with a challenge or opportunity.	REVISITING	Teachers who are fully committed to seeking solutions to the existing problem. This group accesses their own sources as they 'get into relationship' with the problem. They write down personal reflections on a daily basis for a few weeks on why they feel or think this problem exists and how they would have tackled it traditionally.	1. What factors are contributing to this problem? 2. What are the significant factors that are contributing to this problem? 3. What do I normally do to tackle this problem? 4. Have I used the same approach before in the past? 5. IF yes, why isn't it effective?

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Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
		STAND-BACK		1. Why did I intervene as I did? 2. What was I trying to accomplish? 3. Was my method/ approach effective? 4. If yes, how? 5. If no, why not? 6. What factors influenced my decision-making? 7. How did my colleagues or students react to the approach?
3. A Retreat	Everyone comes together for a short retreat where key insights from the journeys are synthesised.	MOVING ON	The core group comes together for a retreat where they share their reflections and draw on each other's prior knowledge and experiences. Here, discussions will lead to key strategies that are effective being identified and noted.	1. What are the various ways I could tackle this problem? 2. What will be the consequences of this action?

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Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
4. Deep Personal Reflection and Presencing Work		RESOLUTION	The core group then 'rethink' the key strategies and reflect on future outcomes. For instance, will the solution prevent the same problem from occurring in the future? What are the possibilities that this problem will occur in the future and if so will this solution be effective or another solution is called for?	1. How do I feel about this decision? 2. How have I made sense of this experience in light of past practices and future possibilities? 3. Has this experiences changed the path of my development as a teacher?
5. Sharing and Closing of Ideas and Experience	Team operates from a different place. A different level of energy and inspiration	MORE REFLECTION	The team then brings their findings to the other teachers in their school. Teachers are asked to try out the new practices and write down their own daily reflections.	1. How effective is this approach? 2. How can this approach be improved? 3. How do my students react with this approach? 4. How do I feel about this experience?

WHEN EFL TEACHERS INQUIRE IN A TEACHER STUDY GROUP

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ABSTRACT

This research project explored the shared learning that took place over one year among non-native English graduate students engaged in a voluntary teacher inquiry group formed to encourage the professional development of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. The study aimed to examine and document how the group interaction patterns fostered professional development and enhanced the understanding of language teaching and learning theories. The researchers have analysed the data using hermeneutic-reconstructive analysis, which involves the articulation of implicit features of meaning, such as meaning fields and validity claims, into explicit forms. As a result, a cyclical pattern was discovered that characterised the group dynamics. This pattern mirrored findings published as 'the inquiry cycle' (Harste, Short and Burke, 1988). This interaction patterns demonstrated how teaching philosophies and practices mostly initiated in the western countries can best be reshaped and negotiated in cross-cultural EFL teaching.

Purpose of the Study

This research project explored shared learning over one year among non-native English graduate students in a voluntary inquiry group formed to encourage the professional development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Specially, this study investigated the issues derived from the group in terms of: (i) the new insights and knowledge EFL teachers have acquired about English learning and teaching in US graduate programs; (ii) how they planned to use and support the implementation of that knowledge in their home countries; and (iii) whether the pedagogic principles promoted in some US university faculties are automatically applicable in other educational contexts with diverse cultural traditions. The study aimed to examine and document how the group interaction patterns fostered professional development and enhanced the understanding of language teaching and learning theories across different cultural contexts. The study illuminated the most salient issues involved in transferring teaching theories and practices originating in Western cultures to the EFL contexts. The study on the voluntary group aimed to empower EFL teachers in their professional development and to establish a collaborative learning community for non-native English teachers coming from different

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socio-cultural contexts. This research intended to investigate how this model of teacher inquiry group provided opportunities for EFL teacher learners to discuss topics, raise issues, project mediation of competing knowledge, and further examine underlying teaching assumptions through collaborative reflection. By working together collaboratively in this group, these EFL teachers constructed meanings based on what they have learned in the Language Education program and together envisioned how to transport this knowledge in the cross-cultural contexts. The study of a cross-cultural teacher inquiry group provided the basis for developing a much needed practical model of continuous professional development for ongoing English education reform in Asian countries. This study has its significance on its theoretical and practical levels concerning teachers' professional development. EFL teachers' professional development is still in its embryonic stage. The importance of bringing a group of English teachers together to formulate a 'thought collective' (Fleck, 1935: 39) group cannot be over-emphasised. The collaborative inquiry with teachers from different teaching contexts will further promote teachers' understanding of how to make interactive communication possible in their own English classrooms.

Literature Review

Teacher study groups provide an effective framework for teachers to take ownership in strengthening and navigating their own learning, practice, and growth. Self-directed and lifelong learning ensures that practitioners become more competent (Azaretto, 1990; Cervero, 1988; Houle, 1980; Doran,1994). Professional development should be self-directed so that the teachers hold the control over their long-term learning and growth (Cervero, 1990). What is ultimately important is that individuals possess a sense of ownership, and are responsible for their own learning and able to develop a collegial culture in which teachers meet their own needs (Brookfield, 1984; Knox, 1986, Doran, 1994). Personal inquiry and exploration are controlled from inside by the membership and collaborative direction of the focus is owned by each member. Each member shares a sense of equality and responsibility.

Collaborative inquiries are the essence of teacher study groups. It has long been argued that learning and knowledge are socially constructed. Dewey (1938) claimed that "all human experience is ultimately social: it involves contact and communication" (p. 38). The notion of collaborative community is similar to what Fleck (1935) described as "thought collective," which means "a community of persons mutually exchanging ideas or maintaining intellectual interaction" (p.39). Inquiry groups aim to promote professional growth so that learning and teaching practices

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become rich and generative experiences for each participant. The process of being involved in a collaborative group and negotiating meanings is central to the goal of transferring practical knowledge to EFL contexts. Study groups aim to build up a sense of community learning that makes use of group members' inquiry, knowledge, and reflection as vehicles to improve instruction and professional development.

Many researchers have reported promising results of initiating and participating in teacher study groups. Unia contends that her experiences in a teacher study group helped her "sustain and further develop changes" (1990: 131) in her pedagogy. Meyer (1998) regards the study group as a forum for teachers to substantiate their passions of teaching and learning. Watson and Stevenson's (1989), participants in a support group for Whole Language teachers, strongly believe that "those involved in professional change need to receive encouragement, approval, advice, and sound information about their new professional adventure" (1989: 121). Clair's study (1998) reports that the teachers tend to work with one another to outgrow themselves and they favour teacher study group as the professional development format. Lewison (1995) organised a teacher study group for K-5 elementary school outside of Los Angeles area and concluded the effectiveness of the teacher study group as follows: teachers' changes in classroom practice, changes in beliefs about literacy learning, and changes in teachers' expectations for students. Besides, in the beginning teachers viewed the group as a way to associate with and learn from experienced teachers. The teachers in the group made a distinction between this experience with previous training experiences and claimed that the safe and non-threatening atmosphere of study group allowed them to share and to categorise the process as 'teacher friendly' (Lewison, 1995). To date, this persuasive body of research on teacher study groups, however, has focused exclusively on communities of English speaking teachers, rather than on non-native speaking EFL teachers' professional development. As graduate students and teacher learners projecting learning onto rapidly transforming EFL contexts, this study intended to fill the void in the literature in investigating the processes that nurture EFL teacher learners in their graduate studies, so that they could transform the theories into relevant practice.

Methods

Participants and Context

The group members were six graduate students pursuing their degrees in a U.S. graduate program (five for Ph.D. and one for Masters) during the time of this study and would soon return to their home countries to teach English as a Foreign Lan-

guage in diverse environments, from elementary school to college levels. Five of the participants were from Taiwan and one from Korea. This group consisted of both experienced and novice teacher learners whose teaching experience ranged from one to seven years. Group participants played dual roles as non-native English speaking graduate students and future EFL teachers. My role in this teacher study group was as a participant observer, following Borg and Gall's (1983) observation that, "by being actively involved in the situation that the researcher is observing, the researcher often gains insights and develops interpersonal relationships that are virtually impossible to achieve through any other method" (p. 26). Pseudonyms were adopted for each participant other than the researcher.

The group was naturally formed outside a graduate course where these six participants recognised our common experiences and common differences from the rest of the group–native-English-speaking in-service teachers. Experiencing both empowerment and frustrations in the graduate course and realising that their voices could be strengthened in a sub-group armed with similar concerns, struggles, goals, purposes, cultural backgrounds, and language ability, the group decided to meet weekly as a formal group to dialogue with one another for one year. The group meetings lasted four to five hours on a weekly basis. The group members negotiated the topics each wanted to discuss and decided which articles or books to assign as reading for each week. The six group members alternated leading discussions, writing summaries of discussion, and sending them to group members via email.

Data Collection
A total of 54 hours were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim because Stubbs (1988) claims that "transcribing conversation into the visual medium is a useful estrangement device, which can show up complex aspects of conversational coherence which pass us by as real-time conversationalists or observers" and "… through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected" (p. 20). Other resources for this study included audio tapes and transcriptions of participant interviews, regular email dialogues among group members, and minutes of the study group sessions.

Data Analysis and Theoretical Tool
The data analysis was ongoing, using hermeneutic-reconstructive analysis, which involves the articulation of implicit features of meaning, such as meaning fields and validity claims, into explicit forms. This method of hermeneutic-reconstructive analysis involves unpacking the complexity of meaning and culture (Carspecken, 1996).

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From the beginning and throughout the study, data analysis took place alongside data collection to allow questions to be refined and new avenues of inquiry to be developed. Comparison from one meeting to another as well as across different sources of data was made to present a whole picture of this study.

The researcher read through the transcribed data several times and reflected on the patterns that emerged in the process of inquiry throughout the year. It was discovered through the analysis how our teacher inquiry group moved through an inquiry process similar in form to the inquiry cycle, which emerged in our group's processes for meaning negotiation. The inquiry cycle was proposed by Harste *et al*. (1988) as a theoretical framework for making decisions about reading and writing programs (Figure 1), and later for the whole curriculum (Short and Burke, 1991). The terms 'authoring cycle,' 'inquiry cycle,' and 'learning cycle' are used interchangeably in the literature (Harste *et al*.,1988).

In this model, if classroom teachers provide learners with frequent opportunities to engage in the inquiry cycle process in reading and writing, eventually learners will produce final individual authoring products to share with
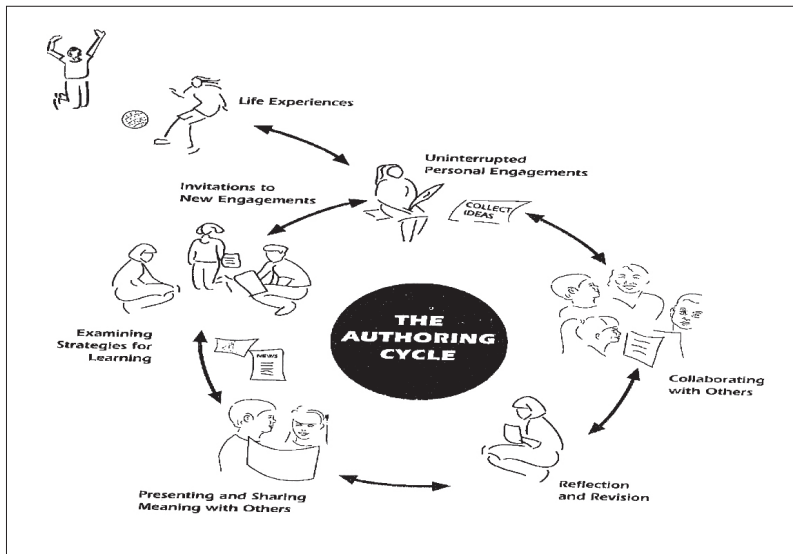

Figure 1: Authoring Cycle (Harste *et al*., 1988)

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their peers. Short *et al*. (1996) suggest that the inquiry cycle was not just about reading and writing, but more about learning and inquiry in a deeper level. They have long advocated that education is inquiry and involves multiple ways-of-knowing. They described the inquiry process as follows:

1. Building from the known through voice and connection;
2. Taking time to find questions for inquiry through observation, conversation, and   selection;
3. Gaining new perspectives through collaboration, investigation, and transmediation;
4. Attending to difference through tension, revision, and unity;
5. Sharing what was learned through transformation and presentation;
6. Planning new inquiries through reflection and reflexivity; and
7. Taking thoughtful new action through invitation and reposition. (Figure 2) (p. 52).

Short (1996) explains, "the arrows in the cycle go both ways, indicating that there is continual movement back and forth between the different aspects of the inquiry process, rather than a specific sequence or hierarchical order" (p. 17).
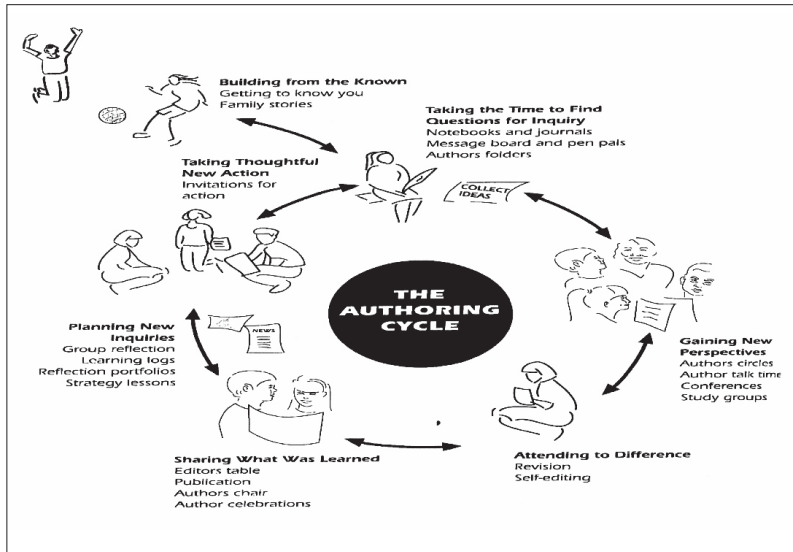

Figure 2: The Authoring Cycle (Short *et al*., 1996)

The Inquiry Cycle

Taking the time to find
questions for inquiry

Building from
the known

Acquiring new
knowledge

Taking thoughtful
new action

Gaining new
perspectives

Planning new
inquiries

Attending to difference

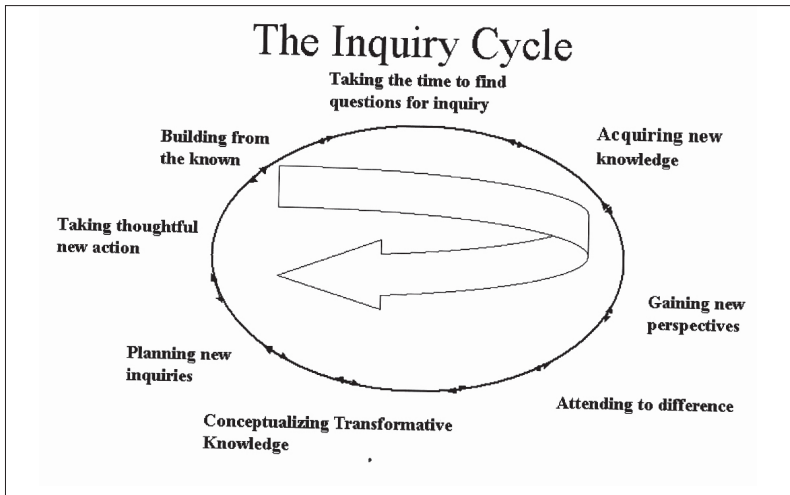Conceptualizing Transformative
Knowledge

Figure 3 : The Emergent Inquiry Cycle

Examining the data from our teacher inquiry group carefully and reviewing the patterns that emerged during discussions of the recurring themes, it was evident that the group went through the inquiry cycle as a whole and within topic discussions as well. The next section will illustrate how the inquiry cycle served as an emerging pattern from the data and how our group went through this cycle when discussing topics in particular, and in engaging in a one-year inquiry process in general. The inquiry cycle which served as a theoretical framework was modified to better represent the group interaction dynamics. This inquiry cycle that emerged 'naturally' and without planning in our group process, will be explained below. The new emergent cycle (Figure 3) occurred several times in our group as the group took up different topics and moved through them. The researcher will first describe the emergent inquiry cycle in general, and provide an illustration of it with respect to the topic, inquiry-based curriculum, broadly discussed by the group.

Findings

Building from the Known Through Voice and Connection
Learning is a process that learners could be engaged in by connecting the unknown to the known. "Up close and personal" ought to be education's new motto' (Short *et al*., 1996: 320). The cycle started with valuing our previous know ledge in light of

our compelling concerns as EFL learners and teachers so that our inquiry group could draw on our learning and teaching experiences and relate the new knowledge we were acquiring in the U.S. graduate school to our personal concerns. We all came to the group with a rich repertoire of language learning and teaching, so our experiences and differences set up the ongoing conversation and reflection. Making good use of our past schemata, we came together to reflect on our learning and teaching experiences that served as our base from which we could explore more. Our past experiences legitimised our current experiences as learners and teachers. The inquiry group format allowed members to find time for conversations as we "wander[ed] and wonder[ed]," (Short *et al.*, 1996: 320) building on what we were learning from each other and starting from there.

Taking Time to Find Questions for Inquiry through Observation, Conversation, and Selection

Although we had very crowded schedules as graduate students, we never failed to meet during the time we had set aside each week to engage in our EFL teacher inquiry group and share our interests, concerns, tensions, and struggles. As international students, we felt professionally excluded, due not only to our lack of experiences of U.S. schooling, but also to our distinct, non-native concerns that differed from those of the English-native-speaking intellectual community. In this forum, we came to co-construct our new knowledge by sharing with other members what we were learning by taking graduate courses, reading professional articles, and observing U.S. classrooms. We were turning over the new learning experience in our minds and tried to make sense out of them together as a group. We drew on each other's knowledge to envision the whole picture of how language should be learned and taught, while continually considering and challenging each other's teaching assumptions.

We collaborated with each other to make plans for our discussion topics and group meeting activities. As time went on, we re-negotiated our original plans and made them more personal and meaningful for our needs as EFL teachers. We constantly reviewed our concerns and revisited the lingering questions to rethink those issues. Through conversation, we felt the freedom to vent our frustrations and concretise our concerns, share our curiosities, and pose questions to each other. We connected what we knew about our home countries' systems to our new knowledge and explored where the new knowledge could be situated.

Acquiring New Knowledge through Meaning Negotiation, Problem Posing,
and Information Co-constructing

Our group's own cycle emerged with this stage that turned out to be additional to
the formal 'inquiry cycle.' This stage was added to this model to better reflect our
group dynamics. As we learned new knowledge in a graduate program in the US, we
were absorbing the new teaching theories and philosophy at a rapid speed and
trying to internalise them in order to make the best use of them. This teacher inquiry
group functioned as a colloquium for us to openly state what we understood con-
cerning the new theories and philosophy we were acquiring. We were in the phase
of fully apprehending them by negotiating meanings with other group members,
posing more questions and concerns for further discussions, sharing what we cur-
rently understood, and, as a result, co-constructing the new knowledge in the group.

We examined our understanding of this new knowledge by connecting what
we experienced about inquiry-based curriculum. First, we concretised inquiry-based
curriculum by relating it to our learning in our college years and also our current
graduate studies. Then we critiqued to what extent these classes were 'open' and
'loose' enough to have inquiry-based curricula. We conceptualised this idea by
identifying a course in which the inquiry-based spirit prevailed.

Gaining New Perspectives through Collaboration, Investigation,
and Transmediation

In the discussion group, we found it safe to share what we truly believed and
provided each other an avenue to assess different perspectives from various angles.
In intensive dialogue, listening attentively to different voices and surpassing our
current understanding, we gained new insights. Stimulated by these new perspec-
tives, we gradually learned how to articulate our teaching beliefs. In this supportive
community, by critiquing and challenging each other, and recursively moving back
to previous stages of the cycle, we continually re-negotiated our knowledge. In the
process of intellectual give-and-take, we investigated our beliefs and accessed new
ideas. New perspectives inspired us to outgrow our previous selves as learners and
teachers.

We posed questions which we were eager to pursue on a deeper level. We
shared our diverse learning experiences, reflected on and challenged the underly-
ing assumptions of how each of us had learned and taught in the past. Through the
inquiry process, it was unavoidable to encounter confusions, tensions, surprises,
and struggles. Most importantly, we offered each other corrective suggestions
and proposals and encouraged each other so as not to give in to the temptation of

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adopting new ideas too early. Approaching and absorbing the new knowledge from multiple perspectives expanded our perceptions and worldviews.

Attending to Difference through Tension, Revision, and Unity

There were two ways in which we attended to differences arising from tension, revision, and unity. First, as a group, we attended to diverse understanding of an issue or a new knowledge and respected other people's different interpretations and perspectives. We carefully examined our understanding and brought more evidence or outside resources to further our comprehension of each position. Tensions sometimes arose from expressing the different understanding of knowledge, an issue, or an incident; or from the sharing of our multiple experiences of teaching and learning. The anomalies we perceived in each other's experiences motivated us to look more deeply at an issue while the democratic nature of the community maintained unity. Diverse voices propelled us to continue revising our thinking and approaching new epistemological development.

On the other hand, we took time to observe and investigate the differences between U.S. settings and our home countries and worked collaboratively to determine how best to digest the new knowledge and further transform that knowledge into our cross-cultural contexts. We critically tested the knowledge by posing very compelling questions, requiring us to carefully examine the social-cultural differences between U.S. and our home contexts, for example, in terms of how readily students would voice their opinions. It was inevitable for us to face the challenges and dilemmas when transferring knowledge; however, we came to this inquiry group to be more prepared for these difficulties.

Conceptualising Transformative Knowledge

In this stage, 'sharing what was learned' did not exactly apply to our group dynamics. The original step 'Sharing what was learned: inquiry presentation[1]' was naturally modified to 'Conceptualising transformative knowledge' since our group was inquiring collaboratively rather than individually. Thus, we will present at this stage how our group gradually moved from our previous stances to new understanding and continually modified and adjusted our knowledge to better fit our native contexts. Knowledge was transformed internally through reflection, conversation, and sharing. As a result, we furthered our current epistemologies concerning language teaching and learning in a supportive community.

While discussing our different understanding of inquiry-based curriculum, we started to gain new perspectives. The "thought collective" (Fleck, 1935: 39) helped

Table 1: Conceptualising the Inquiry-based Curriculum

What we used to believe/question	Potential understanding/movements
We have a very rigid curriculum so we cannot do IBC.	❖ We should work collaboratively with other language teachers. Language should be taught holistically instead of chunking time into different periods of listening, speaking, reading, and writing classes.
We have periods of time for certain subjects so IBC cannot work.	❖ In EFL settings, certain periods could be open for personal inquiry. Teachers could allow students to explore their individual inquiries without limiting the scope. How ever, teachers should explicitly tell students what they expect to evaluate.
How could students inquire if they only have limited English?	❖ Li-Ting suggested that the teacher could allow for 15-20 minutes at the end for L1 time. Students could express freely using L1.
	❖ For beginners, they are burdened with learning vocabulary, or decoding skills. Learners at higher levels could do personal inquiry. For us, English is just a subject rather than a tool that we could use for inquiry.
What is inquiry-based curriculum?	❖ Learners could engage for a long period of time in their inquiry, like the whole morning or the whole day.
What should teachers do in an IBC classroom?	❖ Teachers have individual conferences with students and offer help or suggestions. Students could plan their own curriculum with teachers' advice. Teachers and students could sign a contract of agreement on the plan.

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	❖ Teachers should do invitations before students start their personal inquiry.
Language classes are chunked into pieces of periods, such as speech, listening, novel reading, or writing.	❖ We should collaborate with different language-skill teachers to engage our students in an on-going, integrated, meaningful curriculum.
Inquiry-based curriculum provides diversified education.	❖ Learners should be encouraged to go beyond their inquiry within certain areas so that they won't be limited by their scope of knowledge.

us to expand our own understanding of inquiry-based curriculum (IBC) from a variety of angles. We moved from what we used to believe/question individually to a potential new understanding as a group. Table 1 summarises the shift.

Planning New Inquiries through Reflection and Reflexivity
Reflection as an internal process and reflexivity as a collaborative process worked together to generate new inquiries. While assimilating the new concepts in our field, we carefully examined the EFL contexts and together anticipated what would and would not work in our home countries. Involved in critical reflection, we to-gether anticipated and strategised ways to deconstruct some barriers, encouraged each other by providing alternatives, and initiated some invitations to each other in the group or to people outside of the group. As a result, we generated more inquiries that would take our conceptions further. The meaning negotiation phase made it possible for us to make sense out of the new knowledge and ponder its potential utilisation in our contexts. In group discussions, one issue tended to raise another, propelling our inquiry towards a clear comprehension of EFL pedagogy.

After defining the inquiry-based curriculum, we planned more inquiries to help us approach potential teaching ideas and classroom practices. Group members discussed how to guide the inquiry-based curriculum and how to set up invitations before students explored their inquiries, as shown in the following excerpt:

Ru-Fang: I also wonder how a teacher should guide the students and start invitations in this kind of curriculum. Don't you think invitations should go before it? I don't think kids will start to inquire something spontaneously. So I wonder how the teacher starts the invitations for students in the beginning.

Hui-Chin: Teachers should definitely offer enough resources or directions; otherwise, they will be so lost (GM).

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This excerpt challenged inquiry-based curriculum in such a way that learners needed to be guided in exploring multiple possibilities before they jumped into their inquiries. It also raised the dilemma we often had, 'how much free space should we give our students?' If we opened the door big enough for them, would they really have the capability to go for their choices? We argued that if not provided with enough guidance, students would not be sure where they were heading for their inquiries. Bringing in past teaching and learning experiences, we began to project how inquiry-based curriculum would work in our contexts since our learners were educated in the way of receiving knowledge directly from the teachers. When children were taught that there was a single correct answer in our systems, how would we guide them to seek for other alternatives and go for their genuine inquiry? It became a hard task for us as EFL teachers to find the fine line. Before opening the door for them to explore their inquiries, we need to give the keys of adequate guidance and rich resources for their engagement in their inquiries. Rich resources and good preparation by the teacher were crucial for students to pursue their inquiries. It is imperative to recognise the potential problems in our own contexts when projecting how to implement new knowledge.

Taking Thoughtful New Action through Invitation and Repositioning
Our group constantly repositioned ourselves in the journey of professional growth. We were growing as learners as well as teachers, so our identities were evolving in relation to our interactions with the world and existing knowledge systems. Although we could not take thoughtful actions immediately in actual classrooms, we were taking the actions in our own professional learning process, inviting other group members to try new ideas, and enthusiastically planning what our language classrooms would look like. We shared and challenged ourselves to consider what actions we planned to take, as soon as we returned home, based on our collaborative inquiry in the group. Our ongoing inquiry focused on how our collaboration in a transformative inquiry group would continue to support our teaching and continual learning.

After intensive discussion, Ru-Fang said she would hold individual conferences with students when she went back home for teaching. She recognised the significance of consultation with individuals. It demonstrated that she valued the learning process over the product and that our conversations had raised her consciousness to emphasise the process of student' engagement in the inquiry process instead of evaluating the final product.

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Li-Ting proposed that she would invite other teachers to collaborate on planning an inquiry-based curriculum in which students could engage in an ongoing project and language could be integrated together as a whole. Li-Ting stated, "I wonder if we as teachers could work together to understand what every student is doing. I think I will try to work with other teachers. But I don't know if it will work well." Li-Ting started to envision the likelihood of inviting other teachers who teach other language skills to plan the curriculum together and thus make it more integrated as a whole. However, she doubted the possibility of making it work, "I think for colleges in Taiwan, maybe it won't be the case." She raised the issue of college teachers' isolation. She anticipated the challenges to disrupt the taken-for-granted curriculum plan by inviting other colleagues to work together as a team. The study group allowed each of us to reflect on the knowledge we were currently learning, carefully examine the home country contexts, and further predict the potential challenges. Later on, Moon agreed with Li-Ting, "Curriculum should go this way. I don't see the point of taking them apart. Students should use English to inquire about their interests instead of focusing on the language skills themselves." The discussion challenged the underlying assumption beyond language curriculum in Taiwan and Korea and questioned why language was divided into different pieces. Learning from other perspectives of how a language curriculum should be, we questioned our existing curriculum and planned thoughtful actions when teaching English at home.

In the discussion, we often expressed our uncertainty, uneasiness, and doubts regarding transferring the new knowledge into our home countries. We were not sure what the pure inquiry-based curriculum would be like either in the U.S. setting or our future classrooms. On one hand, we were afraid we did not understand it well enough to adopt it; on the other hand, we were concerned about carefully evaluating our cross-cultural differences before implementing any new knowledge. The following excerpt illustrates how group members repositioned ourselves and acknowledged our professionalism of being classroom teachers by assuring each other that we should consider the cross-cultural differences carefully before implementation.

Li-Ting: Like what I said, if school is 100 % inquiry-based, students do not need to go to school

[All laugh]

Li-Ting: Don't you think? School is set up the way like you learn most at school. When you go out, you do something else. I always think that those pro-

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fessor or theorists set up high ideas and big visions. So I also argue how pure you could go or how far you could go should depend on your own educational contexts.

All said: Right, that is right!

Hui-Chin: I think only we as teachers know what exactly works best for our class. If you want to follow everything which is pure, it doesn't work for our class because of the different socio-cultural differences. What would you choose? Would you choose to follow pure philosophy or would you choose what works best for your class?

Li-Ting: Look at Dr. Harste's class, do you think it is pure enough? NO! We still have to read certain books but you could approach your own project whatever you want

Hui-Chin: Yes, still there is a format or direction for us to follow

Li-Ting: There is certain readings you have to cover, certain times you have to hand in your paper. You cannot say I am still inquiring about the course, so I cannot hand in the assignment.

[All laugh]. (GM)

Tensions arose through discussions between theory and practice, and the ideal and reality. In our conversation, each of us at different times over the year voiced our uneasiness with implementing the new knowledge in a *pure* form in our own contexts. The more we came to understand the pure theory, the more hesitant we became to adopt it. Li-Ting responded to our uncertainty by arguing that teachers should integrate the social-cultural and the contextualised factors into our curriculum implementation and make professional decisions in our own classrooms. We agreed to the fact that as long as we understood the theory well enough, we as EFL classroom teachers could be confident in making the judgment of what would work best for our students instead of being trapped in pure theory.

In sum, we explored our inquiries, examined our past learning and teaching experiences, gained new perspectives through sharing, came to a new unity by examining our existing assumptions and acquired theories, attended to different understanding by referencing our own experiences or outside resources. The inquiry cycle in this way served as a professional development framework. Because the present study was an exploration of the professional development of participants in the inquiry group, the inquiry cycle turned out to be representative of the group dynamics.

Conclusion

As the pattern of group dynamics emerged, it naturally manifested a version of the inquiry cycle. The modifications of the original model suggest the group's extensive participation in that cycle over different topics and my close attention to the resulting data. Because there was natural similarity between the inquiry cycle and our professional development, there was no need to impose the inquiry cycle as an analytical tool. Rather, my own reconstructions from the data resulted in a pattern that closely matched this cycle. This study illustrated how the inquiry cycle could be utilised for framing professional development. The process of undergoing the recursive stages in a fashion similar to the inquiry cycle manifested the foundational group interaction patterns. Thus, the inquiry cycle could imply professional development and support for teachers involved in the process illustrated by the characteristics of the inquiry cycle. This model provided the teacher education programs with a theoretical framework to cradle the growth in inquiry groups.

As we ourselves experienced an inquiry-based learning group for our own learning, we realised that we were gaining autonomy over our learning and finding its relevance to our future teaching. Through the frame of inquiry-based curriculum, our personal inquiries as EFL teachers progressively transformed our knowledge as we continually asked various questions and engaged with like-thinking colleagues. Little (1993) claims that inquiry-based professional development demonstrates the best practice. The ongoing inquiry-based professional development model prevented us from simply replicating the new knowledge in practice; instead, it allowed us to practise collaborative reflection with the group.

Coming from different countries, we continually battled the competing forces of our native contexts and the teaching theories generated from Western philosophy. I believe that right from the beginning, the practices of reflection and inquiry should have been encouraged as an integral part of graduate training. This group provided us with the opportunity to practise collaborative reflection and explore together our evolving inquiries. This inquiry group also prepared us as EFL teachers who were detached from teaching practices to make connections to real-life classroom situations and related our personal experiences to the theories we were acquiring. Chances were given for participants in the group to take turns proposing topics, mediating discussions, or offering invitations. Graduate students who previously devoted all their time to isolated work for academic accomplishment now had the opportunity to share openly and collectively. van Lier (1996) states, "Neither intelligence, skill, knowledge nor understandings are locked inside individuals; rather, they are acquired in social interaction and spread around in our social and

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physical environment" (p. 8). Hence, the teacher inquiry group became a social forum through which members shared different perspectives and resources, learned to articulate individual takes on issues, and brainstormed collectively possible solutions to our problems and dilemmas.

New theories and knowledge can invigorate us to renovate our profession, but only if we can contextualise the knowledge in our own settings and co-construct it to advance our understanding, will changes take place. Our devotion to the inquiry group resonated with the notion in Rardin *et al*. (1988), "The inner act by which a person [became] receptive to new information and assimilate[d] it in such a way that he/she [was] able to operate out of it …. [was] the act of ownership and commitment to new meaning and values" (p. 154). In the course of one year, our knowledge base was not only advanced through meaning negotiating, but also through attending to differences and sharing perspectives. More importantly, we were encouraged to reflect on who we were, where we came from, where we were then, what we knew and believed concerning language learning and teaching, what our students' needs were, who our students would be, and why our teachers used their particular pedagogies. We negotiated meanings concerning the knowledge pertinent to us and took full responsibility over our own learning, and we continued to develop perpetual inquiries. We stepped outside of our unexamined assumptions and together took a critical stance while reflecting on our past and current experiences.

As a result, we were empowered in many different ways. First, we began to envision the possibility of translating what we acquired here in a teacher education program to our future contexts. We started to critically reflect on the process of progressing through our teacher education program and to express what we believed and shared our learning and teaching experiences out of a desperate desire. Gradually, we gained strength and support from the group conversations and affirmed each other's roles as graduate students and future teachers. Our voices contributed to the collective power that revivified each of us. According to van Lier (1996), sharing voices enables one to reject the concept that power comes from somewhere outside the self and to perceive empowerment in the reflective instead of the receptive form. Moreover, when teacher education programs support collaborative reflection and learning and validate individual responsibility and inquiries, teacher learners are more likely to think like practising classroom teachers and make decisions for themselves as if they were in actual classrooms.

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(Footnotes)

[1] This stage, "Sharing what was learned: inquiry presentation" entailed allowing learners in the inquiry cycle to present their findings from their personal inquiry in the end.

ESL TEACHER-TRAINEE REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF THE WEBQUEST: PRACTICAL OR JUST A HYPE?

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ABSTRACT

The era of computer-mediated-communication in almost all spheres of life, specifically in the teaching process will continue to grow inexorably. The popularity of the WebQuest as one of the most useful teaching tools in ESL has been clearly demonstrated by the number of hits the WebQuest homepage has received. As many as 7.5 million visitors have been recorded at the web site in the nine years from February 1998 to early February 2006. More importantly, the WebQuest activities are seen to have strong theoretical and pedagogical foundations. Lamb and Teclehaimanot (2005) have underscored the advantages of the WebQuest, stressing how the activity integrates the internet into the classroom with evaluation, analysis and transformation of information that propels the activity beyond a mere "hodge-podge collection of facts and opinions" to "a more meaningful and authentic learning experience" reflective of high-level student thinking. Hence, language pedagogy cannot and should not be immune to the advantages the WebQuest and the technologies it can offer with regard to information, resources and opportunities for global communication. The study elicits teachers' views on the practicability of the WebQuest; whether it is indeed feasible and useful to be used in the ESL classroom or is it merely a hype with potential limitations.

Introduction

WebQuest is an "inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet" (Dodge, 1995). It has six critical attributes which make up the structure of the activity that includes: an introduction to the task; a task that is both interesting and can be performed; information resources that will contribute to the completion of the task; a clear process in performing the task; evaluation that acts as guidance and an organisational framework; as well as a conclusion that encourages user reflection and closure. The popularity of the WebQuests has been clearly demonstrated by the number of hits the WebQuest homepage has received. As many as 7.5 million visitors have been recorded at the web site in the nine years from February 1998 to early February

2006. More importantly, however, the WebQuest activities are seen to have strong theoretical and pedagogical foundations.

Lamb and Teclehaimanot (2005) have highlighted the advantages of the WebQuest, stressing how the activity integrates the Internet into the classroom with evaluation, analysis and transformation of information that propels the activity beyond a mere "hodge-podge collection of facts and opinions" to "a more meaning-ful and authentic learning experience" reflective of high-level student thinking. In their retrospective, they discuss how WebQuests are noted to have foundations in "constructivist philosophy; thinking, understanding, and transformational learn-ing; authenticity and situated learning environments; inquiry-based learning; scaf-folding; differentiation; cooperative learning; motivation; and motivation, challenge and engaged learning" (pp. 2-7). Indeed, many educators believe that the WebQuest can help both learners and teachers to be "creative and productive, using this powerful medium to spark the imagination, solve problems, and promote discussion about important issues" (Yoder, 1999: 53).

The WebQuest Model

The WebQuest model was first designed by Bernie Dodge of San Diego State University (*http://webquest.sdsu.edu/webquest.html*). The model incorporates a combination of sequenced steps and preselected linked Web sites to guide learners through the lesson. Dogde (2001) stated that the WebQuest was designed to inspire learners to see richer thematic relationships, to contribute to the real world of learning, and to reflect on their own metacognitive processes. The WebQuest's scaffolded learning structure uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web to motivate learners as they investigate open-ended questions, develop individual expertise in the area they are researching, and participate in a group process that transforms newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding.

Dodge (1995) emphasised that there is no prescribed format for the WebQuest model, but most WebQuests have the following elements:

1. Introduction
An introduction sets the stage and provides some background information. The orientation provides a scenario that engages learners in the task. It should be imaginative and relevant to the learners' needs and interests.

2. Task
The task is a description of what the learner needs to accomplish by the end of

the WebQuest task. The problem designed has to be one that challenges and elicits learners thinking that goes beyond rote comprehension.

3. Process or Steps

A clear description of the process or steps learners need to go through is outlined when accomplishing the task. This is where learners locate, synthe size and analyse information and collaborate with team members to complete the task. They need to know exactly where they are in each step and what to do next.

4. Resources

Since the WebQuest itself is taught on-line, the resources involved in a WebQuest activity is generally Web-based, but it could also be available in print or video resources. The majority of the resources should be found on the Internet where the teacher can provide a common list of resources that can be used by all learners.

5. Evaluation

Pickett and Dodge (2001) recommend that rubrics be used for the purpose of evaluation. The criteria should be clear, consistent, and specific to the tasks set.

6. Conclusion

This section of the WebQuest provides an opportunity for learners to reflect on what they have learned, and perhaps encourage them to extend the experience into other domains.

The Study

In this study, a group of university students explored the WebQuest as part of their course requirement. The course, EDU 3212 Computer Applications in TESL was taught to the undergraduates in their fourth semester. They comprised 60 teacher trainees (average age= 21.6) pursuing a degree course in the Teaching of English as a Second Language or TESL.

During the first lab session which consisted of 2 hours, students were in- structed to familiarise themselves with the WebQuest which included visiting the San Diego State University WebQuest page at: *http://webquest.sdsu.edu/ webquest.html* (see Figure 1) and reading Bernie Dodge's articles 'Some thoughts about WebQuests' and 'Building blocks for WebQuests' that were accessed through this page. They were also required to answer questions related to the WebQuest which were provided in the worksheet.
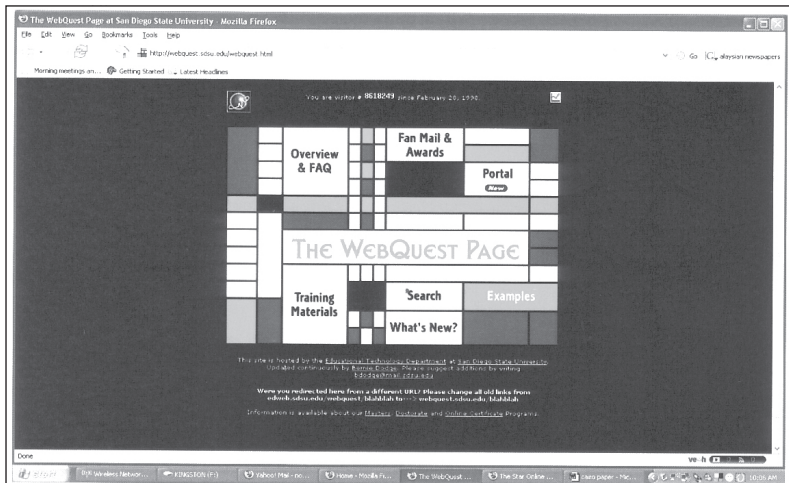
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Figure 1: The Webquest Page

In the second lab session, students were instructed to explore sample WebQuest pages that were accessed through *http://webquest.sdsu.edu/designpatterns/all.htm* (see Figure 2). The aim of this session was to enable students experience and understand how different WebQuests work. As part of the requirement of the course, students were instructed to work in pairs on the WebQuest: 'In Search of A Hero' (see Figure 3). For this task, students had to develop a set of criteria to identify a hero and create a 'Want-Ad' for their hero. In addition, they were also instructed to create a multimedia presentation that summarises and shares the information gathered on their hero and persuades the audience on the hero's qualifications as 'Hero of the Century.'

In the third and last lab session, students presented their multimedia presentation and responded to a questionnaire which was administered after the whole class completed their presentation. The questionnaire consisted of 3 sections: Section A, which served to elicit information on the students' biodata and accessibility in using the computer and the Internet. Section B served to elicit information on the use of diaries as part of their reflection process undergoing the course. For the purpose of this paper, however, responses to this section were not analysed. In Section C, 15 positive statements concerning the benefits of the WebQuest activities were presented to the students (see Lamb and Teclehaimanot, 2005;
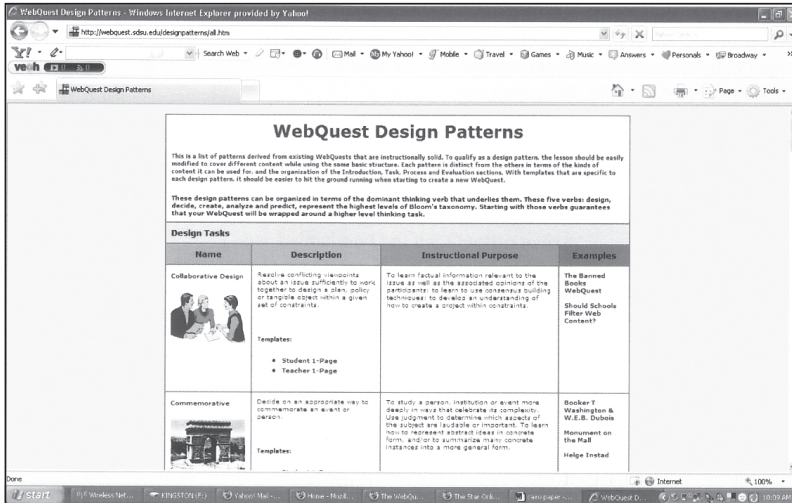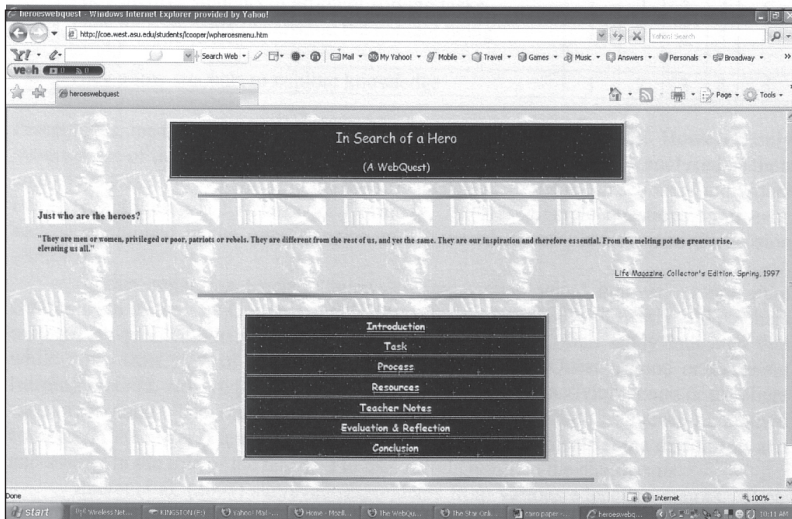
69

Figure 2: WebQuest Design Patterns

Figure 3: WebQuest: In 'Search of a Hero'

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Table 1: Section C of the questionnaire

The following statements are about the WebQuest. Circle the number on the scale that corresponds to your reaction as a teacher trainee to each statement. (SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree)

	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. They are meaningful to the students.	1	2	3	4	5
2. They provide an authentic learning experience.	1	2	3	4	5
3. They encourage higher order thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
4. They encourage students to learn cooperatively with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
5. They provide an appropriate challenge that can motivate the students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. They involve students in problem solving tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
7. They help students understand the content being taught.	1	2	3	4	5
8. They allow students to explore knowledge	1	2	3	4	5

Zheng *et al.*, 2005). A Likert-type scale was used to state whether they agreed to the 15 statements in Section C of the questionnaire (see Table 1).

Percentages, mean scores as well as the median were used for analysis. However, only mean scores of the summated scores for each section were statistically analysed as their analysis is less controversial than the statistical analysis of the mean scores of individual items on a Likert scale (Clason and Dormody, 1994). Sample questions from each section mentioned in the questionnaire are discussed in the Findings and Discussion section.

Studies regarding teachers' views toward technological innovations are quite common. In a study by Gorghiu *et al.* (2005), for example, 80% of nearly 200 teachers reported no problems in the use of WebQuests. However, their study indicated that while more than 90% of the teachers considered the WebQuest a good or excellent learning method, only slightly more than half considered the activity a good or excellent teaching method. The lower positive perception of the WebQuest as a

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teaching method compared to the WebQuest as a learning method seems to indicate some discomfort and uncertainty in the role of the teachers in using WebQuests in the classrooms.

Zheng *et al.* (2005) surveyed respondents from various education majors. Their study revealed that "constructive problem-solving, social interaction and scaffolded learning" were seen as important factors in WebQuest learning by the respondents. Based on this finding, the researchers inferred that teachers "need to shift from creating prescriptive learning situations to developing environments that engage learners and require them to solve problems and construct knowledge that is most meaningful to them" (p. 47).

This study anticipates varying views from the students with regard to the use of WebQuest in the course they undertook. Though it is expected that students will find the WebQuest to be beneficial in language teaching and learning, it is also anticipated that some might regard it as just another tool. In this study, the major views expressed by the students regarding the potential of WebQuests in language teaching and learning are described. Students' views and reflections made in their journal entries are discussed as well. Lastly, suggestions on integrating WebQuests in language teaching and learning through the acceptance of and implementation by the students will also be made based on the findings of the study.

Findings and Discussion

Accessibility in Using the Computer and the Internet
A great majority of the students (45.6%) indicated that they go to the lab between 3-4 times to get access to the Internet every week. As Table 2 further indicates, 42.1% of the students go to the lab between 1-2 times to use the Internet while only 12.3% go to the lab more than 4 times per week to get access to the Internet.

Table 2: Average number of times students go to the lab to get access to the Internet or for other purposes every week

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 times	24	40.0	42.1	42.1
	3-4 times	26	43.3	45.6	87.7
	more than 4 times	7	11.7	12.3	100.0
	Total	57	95.0	100.0	
Total		60	100.0		

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Table 3: Number of hours spent in the lab to get access to the Internet or for other purposes every week

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 1 hour	2	3.3	5.3	5.3
	1-2 hours	19	31.7	50.0	55.3
	more than 2 hours	17	28.3	44.7	100.0
	Total	38	63.3	100.0	
Total		60	100.0		

Table 4: Owning a computer at home/hostel that can connect to the Internet

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	39	65.0	65.0	65.0
	No	21	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Data on the average number of hours spent in the lab to use Internet facilities as specified in Table 3 showed that 50.0% of the students spend between 1-2 hours in the lab to use the Internet while 44.7% admitted they spend more than 2 hours using the Internet in the lab while only 5.3% used the lab less than 1 hour to use the Internet facilities every week.

It was also found that the majority of the students owned a computer either in their home or hostel. As Table 4 indicates, 65.0% of the students in the study owned a computer either at home or in the hostel that can connect to the Internet.

The data obtained on the place where students most frequently go to get on line showed that majority of the students, 50.0% to be precise, reported getting on line by going to the cyberlabs in their faculty, while 41.7% indicated that they get on line by using their own computers either at home or at the college (Tables 5 and 6). Other locations students go to get connected to the Internet are the main library, faculty's resource centre, and their friend's houses.

Table 5: Place that students most frequently go to get online: Cyberlabs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	30	50.0	50.0	50.0
	No	30	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Place that students most frequently go to get online: Home/Hostel

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	25	41.7	41.7	41.7
	No	35	58.3	58.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

To reiterate, the purpose of the study is to elicit students' views on the practicability of the WebQuest; whether it is indeed feasible and useful to be used in the ESL classroom. In general, the students were receptive to the idea of using the WebQuest and were positive as well about the use of WebQuests to learn and teach English. Almost all of them (96.7%) admitted that, before they undertook the course: EDU3212 Computer Applications in TESL, they had never heard of the WebQuest before.

Overall, students reacted positively towards the benefits of using the WebQuest to facilitate English learning as indicated in Table 7. Students felt that the WebQuest and its activities were meaningful (M = 4.21), provided an authentic learning experience (M = 4.45), encouraged higher order thinking (M = 4.08), encouraged cooperative learning (M = 4.32) and provided an appropriate challenge that can motivate students (M = 4.25). These results strengthen the potential of WebQuest as an effective Internet tool in fostering critical thinking skills and providing ample benefits in the teaching and learning of English (Weistein, 2000; Lipscomb, 2003).

In addition, Table 8 indicates that students viewed the WebQuest activities useful as they found themselves engaged in using their knowledge and skills to seek meaningful solutions (M = 4.31), helped students understand the content

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Table 7: Students' views on the benefits of WebQuest

	Mean	Std. Deviation
They are meaningful to the students.	4.2167	.55515
They provide an authentic learning experience.	4.4500	.53441
They encourage higher order thinking.	4.0862	.68273
They encourage students to learn cooperatively with other students.	4.3276	.68538
They provide an appropriate challenge that can motivate the students.	4.2586	.63689

Table 8: Students' views on problem-solving through WebQuests

	Mean	Std. Deviation
They involve students in problem solving tasks.	4.3103	.62708
They help students understand the content being taught.	3.8793	.67739
They allow students to explore knowledge	4.5172	.68162
They allow students to evaluate information.	4.2759	.74441
They break down a task into meaningful chunks.	4.0000	.81650

being taught (M = 3.87), allowed them to explore knowledge (M = 4.51), evaluate information (M = 4.27) and break down a task into meaningful chunks (M = 4.00). The results of this study seem to confirm the claim of Zheng *et al.* (2005) that the constructive problem solving, social interaction and scaffolded learning were seen as important factors in the WebQuest learning.

Table 9 shows that a fairly high number of students perceived the practicability of the WebQuest in the ESL classroom. If given adequate and appropriate facilities, they would use the WebQuest in their teaching (M = 4.22) and find it easy to integrate it into the English lessons (M = 4.12). Students also found that the WebQuest activities are easy to design (M = 3.72) as they are ready-made templates that will help them to plan their activities, the time and effort spent to prepare the activity is worthwhile (M = 4.05) and they foresee that their own students will enjoy the WebQuest activities (M = 03).

The data obtained verifies Lamb and Teclehaimanot (2005) who have underscored the advantages of WebQuests, stressing how the activity integrates the

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Table 9: The practicability of the WebQuest in the ESL classroom

	Mean	Std. Deviation
If all the facilities are provided, I will use WebQuests as part of my teaching.	4.2241	.81742
WebQuests can be easily integrated into English lessons	4.1207	.85998
WebQuest activities are easy for teachers to design	3.7241	.83336
The benefits of the WebQuest activity is worth the time and effort needed to prepare the activity	4.0517	.68627
My students will enjoy WebQuest activities	4.0345	.89767

Internet into the classroom with evaluation, analysis and transformation of information that propels the activity beyond a mere mishmash collection of facts and opinions to "a more meaningful and authentic learning experience" reflective of high-level student thinking. In their retrospective, they discuss how WebQuests are noted to have foundations in "constructivist philosophy; thinking, understanding, and transformational learning; authenticity and situated learning environments; inquiry-based learning; scaffolding; differentiation; cooperative learning; motivation; and motivation, challenge and engaged learning" (pp. 2-7).

Difficulties and Limitations

Though the results supported the tremendous benefits of the WebQuest, students' journal reflections highlighted some difficulties and limitations which included:

- More time was needed to familiarise students with the WebQuest concept and its tasks. Some were *"...still in the dark as to how the WebQuest would allow students to learn problem solving."* It was deduced that since the WebQuest was not developed and designed as an integral part of the teaching process, it was difficult to fit the WebQuest with the content being taught for the course.
- While most students enjoyed completing the task given, some took a little longer and others became frustrated with tasks as they found them to be *" ...a bit boring as we have to follow the format", "...there are too many links and I became even more confused to continue further"* and *"...doesn't really attract my attention or interest".* Hence, although the instructional guide provided support and aided students with the WebQuest task, some were still confused.

- Because the WebQuest was a new online technology to not only the students but to the teacher as well, the quality of supervision and monitoring the students' progress may have been lacking or incomplete as some of the students reported that "… *I need more guidance and direction…"* and *" …need help in organising the information found as they are too many!"*, and these were some of the concerns highlighted by students in their journals.

Conclusion

Since its inception in 1995 by Bernie Dodge and Tom March form San Diego State University, the WebQuest has gained much support from all quarters of the educational community. However, research on the application of WebQuests as an effective method of incorporating technology with educational concepts in Malaysia has been sparse. This study has provided some insights into how Malaysian teacher trainees respond to the use of WebQuests through the reflective learning process. While the majority of the teacher trainees were receptive to the WebQuest's capabilities, their journal entries also revealed some negative views of the WebQuest as a teaching and learning tool.

Careful planning is needed to ensure the successful integration of the WebQuest into the Malaysian school context. Findings from the current study indicate that the teacher trainees acknowledge the WebQuest's potential as a tool that provides opportunity to actively engage in learning by connecting to the Internet, computer-based materials and other available resources. Based on the findings of this study, some factors need to be taken into consideration to ensure the feasibility of the WebQuest application in the ESL teaching and learning process. Lack of time for teachers to create their own WebQuests can be overcome by using what is already available in the teacher-generated WebQuest collection. To cater to students' needs and interests, it is advisable to start with a simple and short term WebQuest and then move on to a more complex WebQuest which spans more than a week to complete.

To guarantee that the WebQuest is not an online tool that merely pays lip service in the context of ESL teaching and learning, an effective management technique to facilitate and monitor students' progress ought to be emphasised. The very nature of the WebQuest should ensure that the students engage in only those activities assigned to them and visit only those Internet sites provided.

As teachers think about how to use computer technologies in language classrooms, they also need to look into the instructional practices that will assist and

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enhance the use of Internet tools in language teaching. The current study provides evidence that serves as the next logical step for teachers to research further on the practicality and feasibility of the WebQuest to be used in the ESL classroom. As indicated in this study, although the WebQuest proves to be a fascinating application tool, it is not devoid of limitations and difficulties. The results of this study provide important knowledge for teachers to recognise the limitations of the WebQuest and be able to adapt its use to their own purposes and conditions. An in-depth understanding of the diversity and dynamics of the WebQuest was gained from the current study that prompts further investigation on the mechanics of making the WebQuest a more effective instructional tool. With the growing interest in WebQuests, it is imperative to ensure its practicality in the ESL classroom and not be seen as just a technological hype.

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AN INVESTIGATION OF EFL TECHNICAL COLLEGE LEARNERS' HYPERTEXT READING

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ABSTRACT

This study was an analysis of forty-six technical college English as a Foreign Language (EFL) freshmen, non-English major, in central Taiwan with their reading experiences and reading strategies committed to reading hypertext from English CD-ROM materials. Interview and questionnaire data were collected for the data analysis. Schema theory, readers' use of information processing strategies, and bottom-up and top-down reading process were used to present different learning styles and strategies. The reading materials used were CD-ROMs published by LiveABC publishing company. The results of this study showed that readers' motivation of learning increased through the use of hypertext reading from CD-ROM materials; therefore, factors such as interest and needs of readers of a reading material deserve teachers' and publishers' attention in selecting suitable reading materials for EFL readers. The lack of enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge restrained technical college readers' reading motivation. Thus, reading materials should centre on the purpose of building new schemata and activate readers' existing ones.

Introduction

The term hypertext was first developed by Ted Nelson in the 1960s. Referring to hypertext as a form of electronic text, Nelson (1965) explains that hypertext is non-sequential writing-text that branches and allows choices to the readers, best read at an interactive screen. Hypertext is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the readers different pathways. Hypertext reading is aimed at allowing more random access, tends to be more interactive, and offers overt ways of reading (Tierney, 1994).

According to Goodman (1967), reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. For the problems in EFL reading, there have been a large number of researchers trying to analyse and resolve them from various perspectives (Koda, 1992). Some researchers argue that EFL readers' possession of appropriate schema is a vital factor that has an influence on EFL readers' reading performance (Ruddell, 1965). Some researchers focus on the examination of EFL reading comprehension and processing strategies (Koda, 1992).

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The present study was intended to inquire into the reading process of EFL readers from a psycholinguistic view. The researchers first adopted Goodman's psycholinguistic perspective on reading traditional paper-based materials, and then refered to EFL technical college readers' experience on hypertext reading materials. In order to conduct this study, three research questions were explored as follows:

1. What are the similarities/dissimilarities of reading habits/experience/strategies committed by EFL college readers between paper reading and hypertext reading?
2. How do different ways of reading vary in their use of information processing strategies?
3. How do participants perceive the importance of hypertext reading as EFL learners?

Literature Review

The current study was concerned with the hypertext reading process from three perspectives, which are interaction between readers and text, schema theory, and bottom-up and top-down reading process committed by 46 EFL technical college readers. According to Goodman, reading strategies refer to initiating and sampling strategies, predicting strategies as well as confirming strategies in the transaction between the reader and the author (Goodman, 1996). Grounded on schema theory, the comprehension of a text is considered an interactive process between readers' background knowledge and the text (Carrell, 1983). According to Lin (2003), Taiwanese students seldom sound the word out or use the sound as a clue to guess the meaning of the word. She further went on to state that many college students rely on spelling and grammar greatly. For most EFL college learners in Taiwan, English has already been taught at least six years during high schools. However, it is not common for most students in Taiwan to be successful in reading traditional English materials. In contrast to more traditional ways of reading, technology offers greater opportunities for interactivity and learner control (Kozma, 1991; Land and Hannafin, 1996). It is a trend that more and more language teachers are begining to get access to the language teaching via multimedia CD-ROM coursework and online reading websites in Taiwan. More importantly, the invention of CD-ROM even makes it possible to reinforce reading skills and then improve reading comprehension through its range of activities. By means of including a variety of media, it presents a non-linear, dimensional and flexible access to information and material (Carver *et al.,* 1992). Thus, it is significant to investigate EFL readers' reflections on their CD-ROM reading experience and strategies to provide some suggestions on curriculum design and teaching strategies.

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Bottom-up and top-down have become common reading strategies for two different paths to comprehension. The models claim that readers perceive every letter, organise the perceived letters into words, and then organise the words into phrases, clauses, and sentences (Silberstein, 1994). Meaning, at any level, is accessed only after processing at previous and lower levels has been completed. Thus readers will process all the letters in a word before the meaning of the word is accessed; likewise, readers will process all the words in a phrase or a clause before constructing its meaning.

Top down models, in contrast, state that comprehension begins with readers' contribution, from higher levels of processing, and proceeds to use the lower levels selectively. Readers use prior knowledge to make predictions about the data they will find in a text (Silberstein, 1994). The process involves creating a mental representation of the text, a gist including the writer's intent and the text content, shaped by the reader's prior knowledge and goals. Goodman (1967) claims that readers do not read every word, but sample the text, make hypotheses about the next word to be encountered, sample the text again to confirm their predictions, and so forth.

The role of vocabulary knowledge in the context of reading comprehension in a foreign language is controversial. Coady (1993) proposes a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading ability, with those who know more vocabularies being better able to comprehend. In addition, Huckin and Haynes (1993) pointed out that "a contextual guessing approach to reading and vocabulary building invite a host of bottom-up problems." Conversely, according to Swaffar *et al.* (1991), "Although the ability to decode vocabulary…is a key facilitator in both L1 and L2 reading, this ability is no guarantee of understanding." However, many previous studies commonly agree that proficient readers utilise both bottom-up and top-down processing, and that successful comprehension is the result of an interaction between both types of processing (Swaffar *et al.*, 1991; Coady, 1993; Lawless and Kulikowich, 1996).

Methodology

Participants
This study included two interviews followed by questions directed at different perspectives when they read hypertext on English CD-ROM reading materials. The forty-six participants in this study were all EFL technical college freshmen from a non-English major department. First, each participant was asked the questions adopted from Burke Reading Interview (see Appendix) to assess their usual reading

habits and reading experience. Next, they were asked to read an English article on CD and retell what they had just read followed by an interview to evaluate their reading comprehension. The readings on CD were published by LiveABC publishing company. It has various activities on the CD such as reading passage, conversation practice, and movie script.

There were two interviews and a questionnaire for each participant within two months. All interview contents were audio recorded. Additionally, there were two researchers at the same time during interviews to reach reliability and build up mutual consensus. Glaser and Strauss's Constant Comparative Method (1967) was adapted to analyse the collected data.

Procedures

The procedure of individual reading interview was designed for gaining access to the ways in which individual participants viewed reading and how their views exert influence upon their reading. Readers' responses to the reading interview can provide not only the information about readers' views of reading but also the clues to explore how readers operate the information processing strategies while reading. The individual reading interview comprises several questions asked about each participant's reading experience and reading strategies. The section began with the comparison of reading interview responses to those questions on participants' reading experience and reading process. The researchers collected each participant's questionnaire, and the interviews were tape-recorded. The length of interview for each participant was about half hour per time. The whole set of data was collected with two interviews along with a questionnaire within two months in spring semester in 2006.

Results

The researchers analysed the data collected and arrived at the following findings.

Advantages of Reading Hypertext

Both teachers and students indicated that computers transform what could be a boring reading task into a novel and dynamic adventure. Language learners would be motivated to learn and read without complaining the static presentation of text. Two teachers gave the following comments. Mai-Ru[1] perceived the traditional books to be inherently static, that is, it is impossible for readers to rearrange the structure of the printed material and further fit in their own schemata. Furthermore, in the paper documents, readers have less chance to access the illustrations,

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diagrams, tables, and other non-prose material. In contrast, the capacity of computers to animate illustrations is particularly useful. The other participant, Yu-Ting also agreed that the dynamic storybook format can encourage greater student participation and trigger learners' interests.

Another important characteristic of hypertext reading is that it can build students' schema. Mei-ru stated that the skit or episode helps students scaffold the background knowledge. Compared to reading printed papers, she stated that CD-ROM reading bridged the gap between students' known and unknown knowledge by demonstrating the authentic context that helped students comprehend more easily from the reading. She gave an example of hypertext reading that made it possible to display the virtual reality of oceans, rainforests, pyramids, volcanoes and so on through simulations of pictures, sound voice, and motion. Yu-ting's students always took advantage of unlimited repetition and representations that were real to them as well. She added that hypertext readings were interactive and also provided pathways for multiple ways of knowing and learning. Yu-ting further articulated that it would be easier to explain the foreign cultures by animation aids from CD-ROM reading. She emphasised how the CD-ROM reading could contribute to their scaffolding of cultural and conceptualised schemata. Yu-ting further explicated that multiple options such as larger print, audio and visual simulations, live motion examples and multiple branching options all enhanced the learner as new vocabulary and concepts link to the existing schema.

Reading Tools

Mei-ru further stated that readers usually have several tools such as dictionary, glossary, thesaurus, and index to help them comprehend difficult reading material. However, based on her investigation from several years of teaching experience, students prefer not to use those. She reported that her students perceived those resources as intruding on the reading task. As it takes a few minutes to look up a word in a dictionary, it interferes with the continuity of the material being read. However, she emphasised that when text was presented by computers like CD-ROM or the Internet, readers can consult the word definition, and it appears in a corner of the screen without disrupting the main text. Similarly, computers can synthesise the previous appearances of any word in the text or provide a list of commonly used synonyms. Yu-Ting also suggested several features that enhance readers' reading comprehension in regard to on-line help based on her experience of

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[1] All names have been changed to preserve anonymity. Mei-ru and Yu-ting are teacher participants.

utilising CD-ROM in her class. She pointed out that video viewing may fill readers with proper background knowledge while picture illustration can offer certain background knowledge. What is more, a reader may consult an explanation of a difficult new word by clicking the keywords devised in the form of a hypertext. These immediate aids resolved the vocabulary problems of the readers. Likewise, if readers have difficulty translating a certain passage,they can consult one other on-line help —translation. Moreover, readers have verification of their comprehension ability by using paragraph exercises that stress vocabulary, dictation and multiple choices. Besides, readers may simultaneously listen to text reading aloud, or readers may want to strengthen reading by using the repetitive function.

Individualisation

Most participants stated that the non-linear hypertext presentation allows readers to choose their own patterns of reading and enhances their reading comprehension. Mei-ru suggested her students would re-read the same passage several times and click the interesting animations to help them get the meaning across in the reading passage. The students expressed to her they did not feel bored in the class with hypertext reading any more because they can find something to interest them at different times and thus they can explore the reading more and listen to the authentic pronunciation immediately. Their needs can be met individually. Similarly, Yu-ting claimed that there are usually fifty students in one classroom. Most of the students in the elementary school cannot pay attention to their teachers in class for more than fifteen minutes. She described that the students are just like worms in the can and it is very difficult for her to control the whole class. She used to spend much time on discipline. Compared to the traditional reading instruction, she stated that she was amazed how students could concentrate on hypertext reading for a 40-minute class period. She described that she always spends twenty minutes navigating and demonstrating the main paths and content of reading and pinpointing the key ideas to students. Next, she allows students ten or fifteen minutes to explore or read intensively the passage they are interested in. From her observation of students' reading in hypertext context, she found CD-ROM's hypertext reading to cater individual's needs, allowing for individual instruction because each student would spend time reading the session s/he is not familiar. Besides, she noticed students are motivated to practise the reading exercise on the format of games in CD-ROM presentation due to the fact that it gives immediate feedback, interesting animation and interactive response. Both the participants mentioned that hypertext reading context shifts the teacher-centred classroom into a learner-centred one that cultivates students' autonomous learning and reading strategy.

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Reading Patterns in Hypertext

The student participants reported that using CD-ROM reading coursework as a supplement for the reading class was more interesting than using the paper-based reading materials. Based on the observation in their classes, the researchers synthesised their conclusions into six major patterns their students have developed in the hypertext context: (i) Skimming, (ii) Checking, (iii) Reading, (iv) Responding, (v) Studying, and (vi) Reviewing. One of the teachers described that after the students went through the schemata building stage for 10-15 minutes, she would instill orientations of navigating and hypertext reading skills into students. After the orientation, she noticed the students usually skim the text at a very rapid pace. Next, the students would systematically scroll through the text and check out the interesting portions. Furthermore, the students would read through the text carefully. After that, the students would look up interactive resources such as on-line aids and practice the exercise such as puzzles or multiple choices. Moreover, the students would study the text again and use the resources in an integrated manner. At last, they reviewed the text or the parts unfamiliar to them and revisited the resources.

Limitations of Hypertext Reading

In these two interviews, both the teacher and student interviewees admitted that there are still some limitations worth teachers' considerations in hypertext reading. Similarly, both the interviewees agree the availability of multimedia classroom in public schools is very limited. Traditionally, reading classes were offered in normal classrooms. Furthermore, Mei-ru indicated that due to the fact that computerised presentation text cannot allow students to jot down their notes or to highlight on their textbooks, students tended to forget easily what they have already learned in the hypertext reading. She further explained she would prepare the printed papers with the same passage or article for students so that they could write down the explanations or what they have learned from the hypertext context. From a different perspective, Yu-ting declared that her students sometimes experienced disorientation in hypertext reading. She thought it was necessary for the teacher to orient the students several times before they become familiar with the hypertext reading context.

Conclusion

Based on the participants' perceptions, the hypertext reading context is found beneficial for readers to enhance their reading comprehension in many ways. The advent of hypertext, a combination of both linear and non-linear text, opens new dimensions for readers. Readers of electronic hypertext are not bound to the limita-

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tions of traditional linear text. They can easily navigate complex documents in a variety of ways, visiting any portion of the material in any order. Furthermore, electronic links can be used to access numerous resources designed to enhance document comprehension and appreciation. Similarly, authors of hypertext are not bound to the linear presentation of text. They can create documents with multiple sequences, each presenting an alternative representation of a complex idea. Being designed to be read multiple times, hypertext documents can provide readers with enhanced environments for reading.

Furthermore, with computerised presentation, students can read their target language at their own comfortable and flexible pace and interact immediately and continually because it provides immediate feedback or animated images and thus contributes to reading comprehension. Additionally, teachers can utilise the computer coursework to enrich or supplement the basic instructions to create an optimal learning environment to facilitate learners' reading comprehension. In order to best make use of CD-ROM in reading class, teachers need to supplement paper prints for students' references.

Implications and Suggestions

One implication derived from this study is the consideration of suitability of a reading material. In order to motivate readers' reading interests, the selection of a reading material is undoubtedly of great significance. Factors such as interest and needs of readers of a reading material deserve a teacher's attention in selecting reading material for readers.

Another point on EFL readers is the lack of target cultural knowledge. Although it was not significant in this study, it is claimed by Carrel and Eisterhold (1988) that reading should strive for a balance between background knowledge and the text itself. In contrast to Ho's (2000) and Lin's study (2003), we might say that cultural knowledge was not a big issue among technical college students. As a matter of fact, most technical college students need more vocabulary to be able to read English materials. As a result, teachers should provide readers more comprehensive materials, giving them accessible cultural information for better understanding. Reading activities should centre on the purpose of building new schemata and activate readers' existing ones.

This study identified EFL college freshmen's reading process in English materials. Though most of the reading problems have been disclosed, the investigation of reading still offers fertile areas for researchers to explore further from different

perspectives. The following suggestions were provided by each participant on the basis of this study:

a. Reading materials have to be interesting, comprehensible, and authentic.
b. Reading materials have their purposes, such as for entertainment or for real world use.
c. Reading materials should contain text and pictures, be colourful and interactive.
d. Reading materials should provide detailed explanation and serve as useful reference for readers.

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APPENDIX

Burke Reading Inventory

Reading Interview

1. When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do? Do you ever do anything else?

2. Do you think that (ask teacher's name) is a good reader? Or who is a good reader?

3. What makes him/her a good reader?

4. Do you think that she/he ever comes to something she/he doesn't know? What do you think she/he does about it?

5. YES - When she/he does come to something she/he doesn't know, what do you think she/he does about it?

   NO - Suppose/pretend that she/he does come to something that she/he doesn't know, what do you think she/he does about it?

6. If you knew that someone was having difficulty reading, how would you help them?

7. What would a/your teacher do to help that person?

8. How did you learn to read? What did they/you do to help you learn?

9. What would you like to do better as a reader?

10. Do you think that you are a good reader?

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READER RESPONSE THEORY: LINK TO YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of 'reader response' and young adult text in the reading classroom of secondary and tertiary level students. The focus on young adult issues through 'reader response' has resulted in overwhelming response at all levels of students in discussions in the classroom. Thus, interest in reading can be inculcated through this approach.

Introduction

The effectiveness of the prescribed texts in the Literature in English Component Programme is a major concern of ESL teachers in Malaysia. The focus on passing with good grades in the exam emasculates the intention of the programme which aims are to contribute to students' personal development and character building (KPM, 2000). Though McRae and Vethamani (1999) have suggested that through the process of reading an assortment of literary texts, students would hopefully develop their language and cultural awareness as well as become better readers of the world they live in, the underlying fact is generally students express a dislike for school reading because they find it boring and of little value. Gurnam Kaur Sidhu (2003) found that one of the major reasons for the lack of interest in reading among Malaysian students is that the prescribed reading materials are not of students' interest. In fact, studies have indicated that although most of the instructional materials are prepared for learners, learners themselves as individuals are not been given much attention (Vethamani, 2003). Thus, there should be a remedy for the above predicament and this paper suggests 'Reader Response'.

'Reader Response' involves focusing on the reader rather than the text, noting that interpretation emerges from the reader's interaction with the text. Those who work with children and young people inevitably concern themselves with readers' responses to literature. Three aspects commonly associated with reader response, namely, the reader, the text and the context, all influence the responses that students make. The reader responds based on his or her attitudes, knowledge , experiences that are brought to the text as well as ability to think and connect to the text. It recognises the reader as an active agent who imparts 'real existence' to the work by reading it and completing its meaning 'by applying codes and strategies.' It is

concerned with the reader's contribution to a text. On the other hand, the text connects the knowledge and experience of the reader to what is relevant in the story that matches the reader's preferences. To quote from Fish (Lee, 2002): "Meaning is an event, something that happens not on the page, where we are accustomed to look for it, but in the interaction between the flow of print (or sound) and the active mediating of the reader-hearer."

This means that however subjective a reader's response is to the text. It is continuous shaping of the events of the reader's mental process that slowly adjusts the thoughts to finally reach an understanding of the actual meaning of the text. According to Jauss (cited by Lee, 2002), it is wrong to say that a work is universal, the meaning is fixed forever. Thus, historical knowledge is of importance to the reader.

No one else can participate in that first act of meaning-making even if all are listening to a reading of the same story. If the teacher is reading aloud, the quality (tone, emphasis, enthusiasm, etc.) of the reading may influence young people's meaning-making (Trealease, 2006). Another view by Holland (1975 cited by Kelly, 2006) suggests that "identity is unity" where the reader arrives after having explored the themes in a text. He says we can each have a different response from each text. Though, Rosenblatt's view on Reader Response Theory has its foundation on the reader rather than the text, we cannot deny the fact that reading is subjective by nature and the aesthetic experience of the reader always difficult to gauge unless we know the background of the reader. Thus, the view that meaning inheres not in the text but in the reader where the reader's activities are at the centre of attention. Lang (2006), disagrees with this view but I juxtapose her views as I am convinced that Reader Response Theory is fundamental to the practical use of literature in the classroom. Furthermore, Rosenblatt's shift to a balanced view in the 1980s shows that the process of literature is fundamentally a negotiation of meanings between reader and writer (Imtiaz, 2004). Hence, the relation between a reader and text is not linear but depends on situations of context .

The main crux of Reader Response Theory is the reaction or response of a reader to a text based on the reader's aesthetic experience. According to Wall (2005), Reader Response recognises that the reader has a significant role in bringing meaning to the interpretation of text. A fundamental principle of both Reader Response and Literary theories states that, "If readers are to have meaningful transactions with literary texts, they must make connections between their lives and the literature" (Hamann *et al.*, 1991). Hirsch (cited by Lee, 2002), takes a referential view of the theory of meaning which differentiates between meaning and significance of the text.

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The meaning of text is what the text on the page represents and significance is the relationship of meaning and anything else. Iser argues that texts contain gaps that powerfully affect the reader, who must explain them. Wayne Booth uses the phrase the implied reader to mean the reader but substitutes the educated reader for what Fish calls the intended reader (Murfin *et al.*, 1998). In this predicament, the terminology used might differ form one advocate to another but the understanding of the text depends on the aesthetic experience of the reader.

Why Young Adult Literature ?

Young adult literature (YAL) can be defined as a literature that caters for adolescents or general audience that relates to the young adult's needs and interests. In short, it looks as if any literature that makes a young adult reader to read can be categorised as YAL but there are distinct characteristics that are mentioned by Vethamani (2003) to show the issues that are related to young adults which are (i) coming to terms with developing sexuality and with physiological changes, (ii) achieving 'proper' gender roles, (iii) issues relating personal choice and abilities, (iv) preparation for marriage family life or meaningful relationship, (v) personal ideology related to moral development, (vi) social a responsibilities, and to (vii) develop interpersonal skills and mass media, popular culture and other influences. YAL offers teenagers something that adult literature does not. And it is created especially for young adults, hoping to give them a more mature understanding of self and the world. In this context, I would like to suggest short stories that relate to these issues mentioned by Vethamani (2003) such as the stories in Chicken Soup for Teenage Soul II (Cavnfield *et al.*, 1998) can also be considered as YAL The stories tend to have a sense of immediacy, rather than nostalgia, and their focus is on the experience of an individual, usually a teenage protagonist. It does not always provide the answers, but rather portrays a young person in search of them (Jenkins, 1999 cited by Owen, 2003). Reader Response recognises that the reader has a significant role in bringing meaning to the interpretation. The type of text that students select also influences their responses. Although both aesthetic and efferent meaning-making are present, an expository text is usually read more efferently or outwardly, that is, for the information it contains, while a piece of literature usually is read more aesthetically, reflecting a personal expression of meaning. Therefore, text selection which reflects the readers' interests, personal experiences and maturity is important to assist meaning-making as well as to provide vicarious experiential guidance to the adolescent.

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All the characteristics of Young Adult Literature show that they relate to the issues of young adults, thus making them apt for reader response. As such, I believe YAL is a key to promote reader response in young adult readers.

Reader Response Theory; the Link to YAL in the Classroom?

Louise Rosenblatt was a pioneer in Reader Response Theory. She explains that each reader produces a "unique experience" as a result of reading because each reader brings his of her "personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations" as well as his or her psychological and physical conditions to the act of reading (Wright, 1995). In relation to this, YAL can be used in the classroom by encouraging response from the students in their own way

An advocate of the genre, Bushman argues that "you can teach young-adult novels in the classroom … and you can work with literature, language, and composition skills, and … you don't necessarily have to teach the classics (although the secondary school curriculum has continued to focus on the canon of approved classics, teenagers and adults predominately like to read texts that are considered by English teachers to be of lesser quality. Such alternative texts as young-adult novels in fact demonstrate the positive qualities which characterise the classics as not apt for teenagers as the main characters of the novels are usually adults" (Koch and Farrell, 1992).

Related Classroom Strategies

Two Reader Response strategies that can be implemented by teachers in class are "creating a climate conducive to learning" and exhibiting appropriate teacher's behaviour'(Bushman and Bushman, 1997). Teachers can create a conducive Reader-Response classroom atmosphere by arranging it in a way that enable students to easily see and hear one another. The key ingredient to the success or Reader Response is the teachers' receptiveness to students' responses which requires an atmosphere of trust so that students share openly and know their thoughts are valued (Rosenblat 1995).

Personal Experience with Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

One example that the writer personally can link Reader Response in teaching is by introducing a YAL text in my Pre Diploma classroom at UITM, Sabah by incorporating Beach's (1993) activities for eliciting responses.

In planning activities for the YAL text; *Hero* by S.L. Rotman, I asked myself the following questions :

Student Attributes
Will my students enjoy this story ?
What do they know about being a Hero ?

Teacher Attributes
How do my knowledge, interests, attitudes, beliefs, and stance shape my response to the text ?
How may my response differ from my students' responses ?

Thus the pre reading activities were generally asking the views of students about certain issues. Before reading the texts, I asked, "What is a Hero?" As usual the response started from the comic book heroes such as Batman, Superman, Kluang man (a local cartoon hero) to soldier and policeman.

After coming to generalisation of the above, the text was read by the teacher aloud with questions asked in between reading. This is to connect the students to their reading and encourage emotional experience by asking them to analyse the problems faced by the character. The characteristic that was unanimous was bravery or courageous. After reading the first chapter, the students were asked to state whether their opinions on being a Hero had changed. Some had changed their perceptions and agreed that there are no heroes now.

The task of the teacher in the classroom is to help develop and maintain the interpretive community and to ensure that each participant finds both private and public space within that community. An aesthetic approach to the YAL has a strong emotional appeal which also provides a specific type of intellectual activities.

A personal response based on a text may provide a useful basis for discussion. Such an approach invites the learner to have a specific relationship that the reader could share in a classroom discussion. The organisation of text discussion also requires some understanding of how students can be helped linguistically. This can be seen in the example of the response of my students to the novel, Hero. It is indeed a necessity for a teacher to be present at the discussion to rectify any errors made by students in speaking or how a point a should be put across in a discussion, for example, giving students cue phrases like 'in my opinion', 'well I think' and many more. Reader Response had made an impact on the students in general as they wanted to continue to read on to find out what happen to the character 'Sean' in the end.

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Once the process of meaning-making moves from the private to the public domain, the role of the teacher is both to keep the discussion going and make certain there is time for reflection, to encourage young people to share their own meanings and to listen to the meanings of others; and, finally, to refer readers back both to the text and to their own lives in an effort to track their own processes of meaning-making socially. The issues that provoke students participation in discussion will inevitably promote speaking especially in the writer's case with novel, 'Hero' where students even from limited proficiency level were able to contribute in the discussion of, 'what makes a hero?' The response was encouraging . Rosenblatt draws two conclusions about the reader and the text: (i) the text is a stimulus, activating the reader's past experiences with literature and with life: (ii) the text functions as a blueprint, a guide through which the reader selects, rejects, and orders responses during the reading (Kelly, 2006). Young Adult literature highlights the importance of young adults' response to a text or novel. Students will read if they have an opportunity to read material that is interesting and relevant to their lives (Brown and Stephens, 1995). Using YAL increases students' awareness of how reading leads to understanding. Nevertheless, in relation to limited time in the classroom, short stories (Carnfield, *et al,* 1998) would suffice.

Conclusion

We all come to a text with unique life and reading experiences that colour our perceptions of the literary worlds we enter. This reality becomes clear in our classes and in workshops. Responses are filtered through the grid of personal experiences; hence each response is unique (Kooy, and Wells, 1996). Thus, with that thought, Young Adult Literature is indeed linked to 'Reader Response' as I view that there are no 'sacred' texts that a student needs to read to be literate but student needs should be the top most priority. Thus, this paper edifies that YAL is a better bet for young adults in terms of response as it deals with young adults facing contemporary issues or problems and it speaks a 'language' that students easily understand.

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THE REALITY OF READING IN THE TERTIARY LEARNER'S WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Teaching literature at the tertiary level essentially involves facing the reality of students' capabilities in terms of reading texts and consequently responding to their readings in writing. Encountering, more often than not, responses that regurgitate lecture notes at times coupled with well informed but barely discussed citations of blocks of paragraphs by critics, many often choosing to let the latter speak for themselves, one begins to comprehend that a majority of these students appear to be insufficiently equipped with the skills of recording and discussing their responses to the reading materials assigned to them. Yet one also significantly learns of the possibilities and impossibilities of the various reading and writing skills of learners in the tertiary classroom and these may be invariably linked to the reading and writing skills fostered in Malaysian schools. This paper will engage in a discussion of the reality of reading in the tertiary classroom by presenting a range of samples of writings by students and examining the reading skills they reflect. It will also discuss possible ways to guide readings with the aim of prodding and provoking independent responses to the texts assigned.

Introduction

Teaching literature at the tertiary level essentially involves facing the reality of students' capabilities in terms of reading texts and consequently responding to their readings in writing. More often than not, one encounters responses that regurgitate lecture notes, at times coupled with well informed but barely discussed citations of blocks of paragraphs by critics. The tendency of many students is to let these external references speak for themselves without engaging with their ideas or linking them to the texts assigned. Faced with this, one begins to comprehend that a majority of these students find it difficult to record and discuss their own responses in their own words. Yet this does not necessarily mean that achieving this is an impossible task.

This article focuses on the ways in which reading skills can be fostered in tertiary students through exercises that guide them into thinking about literary texts such as the short stories, poems, drama and novels as less as an entity that is divorced from their world and more as one that can provide them with insights into

real world issues. The discussion draws on material introduced to Second Year Bachelor of Arts (English Language Studies) undergraduates enrolled in the course 'Readings in Literatures in English.' This course was essentially designed to introduce students to methods that they could use to aid their reading and subsequent understanding of selected literary texts, consisting mainly of poems and short fiction, through the incorporation of key aspects of significant literary theories or critical reading approaches as these are otherwise known.

Critical Reading Approaches to Literature

The term 'critical reading approaches' or critical approaches to literature is widely used in literary studies to refer to methods of reading literary texts using literary theories. Another term that is commonly used is literary criticism. All terms synonymously refer to ways in which one is able to analyse, interpret and thus understand literary texts, in short reading approaches. The passage below contextualises further the frame of reference for the term 'reading approaches' that will be used throughout this article to refer to the theoretical frameworks that were taught to the students of the 'Readings in Literatures in English' course :

> *Literary theory offers varying approaches for understanding the role of historical context in interpretation as well as the relevance of linguistic and unconscious elements of the text. Literary theorists trace the history and evolution of the different genres—narrative, dramatic, lyric—in addition to the more recent emergence of the novel and the short story, while also investigating the importance of formal elements of literary structure. Lastly, literary theory in recent years has sought to explain the degree to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the culture (Brewton, 2006).*

The students of the aforementioned course were guided through six different reading approaches to literature over a period of 12 weeks. These approaches consisted of the theoretical frameworks of Formalism, Reader Response, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Marxism and Postcolonialism. The following is a summary of the essential elements of each approach taught.

The formalist approach to literature centres on what makes a literary text 'literary,' that is, identifying various literary devices and determining their aesthetic functions in the literary texts that were read. The Reader Response approach essentially guides students to chart their responses to the literary text read through identifying milestones in their reading journey and to record how they made sense of the content of the literary text through external sources. The subsequent reading approach, Psychoanalysis, takes students into the world of characterisation and

the ways in which one is able to understand individual characters in a text through an in-depth study of their personalities as projected through various narrative techniques. As the students learnt to distinguish between various portrayals and the many ways they engaged with the complexities of the world, they were subsequently presented with Feminism, a reading approach that brought gender into the sphere of interpersonal relations. With this approach, students learnt of the dynamics of gender roles as they were prompted into identifying the different ways in which male and female roles could be constructed within a literary text. Such an approach also led them into witnessing ways in which one could determine gender oppression as well as identify both submission and resistance to its power structures. The next reading approach, Marxism, led students further afield into human power relations as they were introduced to the ways in which one could determine social hierarchy within a text and how this influences social relations. They were taught ways in which to identify the divisions between social classes and issues of submission as well as resistance to socio-economic domination. Such issues were expanded to include the dynamics of race relations and attendant domination when they were introduced to the last approach, Postcolonialism, which centres on colonial relations and the formation of greater and lesser notions of race identifications. This last approach was introduced to create an awareness of power relations that hinged on issues of race and ethnicity and its roots in colonial domination.

Such a varied exposure to reading approaches was intended to have aided students in obtaining a basic grasp of the various reading approaches and consequently discovering the various possibilities involved in studying literature. My focus in this paper is on the reading responses generated from the first four approaches and my discussion will show among other things how the initial aims and objectives set out at the beginning of a course may often veer from the actual outcome as we are faced with the reality of there being different categories of learners in one classroom and the responsibility of guiding their skills in both reading as well as writing through various means. As Bretz and Persin (1987: 166) put it :

> *Recent theories of language and of literature-reader-response, feminist, contemporary psychoanalytical criticism, and deconstruction reveal a multiplicity of meanings that constitute even the 'simplest' of texts. Within the classroom, these approaches to literature offer new possibilities for active student participation. Freed from the need to 'explain' the correct meaning of the text to students who remain mystified as to how this meaning was extracted, the classroom becomes a place of discovery, of dialogue, and of cooperative reading. Provided their interpretations are cogently argued and textually verified, students learn that their ideas can help to expand the possible meanings of the text.*

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The responses that students articulated in the various modes of learning and the subsequent assessments of their understanding of the reading approaches demonstrated the immense possibilities that were accessible within the world of reading literary texts. While it will be seen in the end that problems in terms of language proficiency ultimately stood in the way of the cogent articulation in the majority of the responses, there were nonetheless rays of light that illuminated the reading path, especially with regard to students' understanding of the texts that they read.

The Reading Tasks

The mode of learning in the course was based on an hour that comprised of a one hour mass lecture followed by a two hour tutorial session where students (approximately seventeen to a class) were divided into small groups of not more than four and given a series of tasks, ranging from class discussions to folios that incorporated responses to literary texts, mainly short stories and poems, based on the four reading approaches as well as two presentations, the first being an oral presentation and the other a poster presentation. Class discussions focused mainly on material conveyed during the lecture coupled with guiding students through reading of either a short story or a poem from the assigned reading approach. This was done through a tutorial task sheet consisting of a number of questions that directed the students to respond to the short story or poem selected by identifying various key devices or issues linked to the assigned approach.

After four two-hour tutorial sessions on each of the reading approaches, students were asked to select a short story of their own choice and create a folio in which they were to compile four sets of responses to that very same text utilising the four reading approaches. Before they commenced on this however, they were given specific guidelines to aid in their reading, as illustrated below.

Reading Approach One: Formalism
The anticipated outcome of introducing the students to this first reading approach is to enable them to connect the form of the literary text to its context or main issue. With this skill, they were expected to move a few steps away from merely retelling the sequence of the text, a common tendency among most students, and be able instead to critically connect the little parts that make up the whole of the text to a main theme. At the end of the exercise, they were expected to be able to view these individual aspects as various devices that were used to enhance the literary quality

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of the text. The following tasks were prepared through an incorporation and subsequent modification of material on the Formalist Theory from Hans Bertens'

Literary Theory: The Basics (Bertens, 2002 : 31-52).

Methodology

1. Students were asked to begin their reading by firstly identifying the various linguistic features of the respective text, that is, the repetition of a word or the repetition of a certain phrase
2. They were then prompted to connect the repetition of the above to an idea that they seemed to emphasise.
3. They were then asked to think about whether the repetitions of the identified words and phrases created certain patterns of sound in the text?
4. After they had established the above, they were then asked to identify points in which the above patterns were broken, i.e if a once repeated phrase appears in a different form or in a different arrangement and whether this altered its earlier meaning?
5. After all the above had been recorded, they were asked to study the patterns of parallelisms and deviations, similiarities and contrasts that were created and to determine whether they centred on a common issue, what is otherwise known as the theme of the story. Consequently, they would come to the realisation that all the above aspects of the story that they identified were devices that helped to reinforce the main theme.

Reading Approach Two: Reader Response

The main objective of introducing the students to this reading approach is to create an awareness of the process involved in the act of reading and understanding a literary text. Their main focus is to record all the associations that they make as they read the text as well as the external sources that they use to help them understand unfamiliar content. At the end of this exercise, they would be able to witness the changing shape of their reading process as they record the changes to their original assumptions of the content of the text. The following tasks were prepared through an incorporation and subsequent modification of material on the Reader Response theory from Tyson's *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* (1999: 153-195).

Methodology

1. Students are to begin with studying the title of the text and noting down what associations first came to mind.
2. They are then to begin reading the text and noting down details of their responses to particular words, phrases, passages, that is:
   - what were certain feelings that they evoked? Did they think further about the meaning of these details?
   - Did they create links between what was read and familiar events?
   - What judgments were made about specific characters, events, passages, words?
   - Were all the above influenced by personal memories and associations?
3. Students are also made to think of other sources that can be used to fill in the gaps in their understanding of unfamiliar content in the text, that is, dictionaries, cultural texts, communities etc.
4. Once they have recorded all of the above, they are then to reassess their first assumption (based on the title) and note down how this has changed and why. This way they become more aware of the process involved in the act of reading and move towards substantiating and supplementing their understanding of the content of the text.

Reading Approach Three: Psychoanalysis

The objective of this reading approach is to guide the students into analysing individual characters in any given text with some depth. The focus of their reading centres around recording the various ways in which each character responds to situations as well as identifying any conflicts that arise both within the character as well as in the encounters with the other characters in the text. They should, consequently, be able to learn more of characterisation. The following tasks were prepared through an incorporation and subsequent modification of material on Psychoanalysis from Chapter 2 of Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today* (13-47) as well as Chapters 6 and 7 of *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (Guerin *et al.,* 2005: 152-221).

Methodology

1. Students are to determine, through detailed evidence from the text, the different kinds of characters that exist in the text by dividing them into the following categories:

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a. Characters who are more concerned with pleasing themselves at the expense of others, that is, those who show no regard for social conventions, ethics or lack moral restraint and have no regard of consequences as a result of their actions.

b. Characters who are concerned only with social rules and regulations, that is, family, religion, the law and consequently suppress their own individual needs and desires.

c. Characters who balance the extremes of (a) and (b) by fulfilling the needs and obligations that are necessary without overtly suppressing or indulging the self.

2. Students are then to discuss whether the above traits create conflicts within the characters as well as with other characters in the text, that is, feelings of guilt or suppression of needs, feelings of envy etc.

3. Once they have established the above, students can then be led deeper into the aspect of characterisation by being asked to analyse the various literary devices used in the text and to determine if these aid in the aspect of characterisation. For instance, do certain images or the use of certain colours in relation to the characters reveal more insights into the character?

4. Once they have recorded all of the above, they should have a good grasp of the characters in the story and be able to substantiate their responses through such detailed analysis.

Reading Approach Four: Feminism

The objective of this reading approach is to take students deeper into the dynamics of the literary text through exploring gender relations as they are described and depicted in the narrative. They would do this by analysing literary devices, characterisation, images and traditional associations of women and to reflect on whether these aspects demonstrate a fair treatment of women in the text. The following tasks were prepared through an incorporation and subsequent modification of material on Feminism from Barry's (2002) *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (121-138) as well as Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today* (81-116).

Methodology

Students are to first determine the differences, if any, in the portrayal of male characters as compared to female characters through focusing on the following:

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1. Do male characters dominate the dialogue found in the text?

2. What status do female characters have in the text? For instance are they secondary to male characters through either being voiceless or nameless?

3. How are women described? For instance are they
   i.   described in ways that focus on physical traits instead of their inner thoughts and power of reasoning?
   ii. compared to women characters from mythology or legend?

4. How do female characters interact with the male characters? Are they timid or more vocal? Are their roles confined to only that of daughter/sister/wife/mother?

5. Do male characters oppress the women through certain actions or words?

6. Are there any female characters who resist traditional expectations of women? For instance do any female characters
   i.   voice their own opinions as opposed to merely submitting to those of the male characters?
   ii. act against oppression by the male characters?
   iii. speak up against injustice to other women characters?
   iv. resist the fixed female roles that they are expected to conform to by behaving in unconventional ways?

7. After the students have determined most of the above, they need to think about what they reveal about gender relations and the status of men and women in the selected literary text? Are men and women treated as equal or do men have an unfair advantage over women? Consequently, does the text also reveal ways in which women can resist gender oppression?

Assessments of Reading Responses
Once the students had noted down all of the above, they were then asked to work in groups to compile a folio in which they were to collate their responses to a short story of their choice from the angles of the four reading approaches above. The following are the short stories that they chose:

Group 1 : *The Prophecy* by Anjana Appachana
Group 2 : *Mariah* by Che Husna Azhari
Group 3 : *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell
Group 4 : *The Prophecy* by Anjana Appachana
Group 5 : *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant
Group 6 : *The Drover's Wife* by Henry Lawson

Group 7 : *Looking for a Raingod* by Bessie Head
Group 8 : *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner
Group 9 : *The Story of an Hour* by Kate Chopin

The following illustrations of student responses are based on that of Group 6.

Responses to Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife*

Reading Approach One : Formalism

Excerpt 1

The author named the black dog as "*alligator*". In familiar language the word alligator refers to a kind of crocodilem; the author uses the word alligator to equate the alligator to the dog.

Excerpt 2

"alligator lies … he is not a very beautiful dog to look at and the light shows numerous old wounds where the hair will not grow. He is afraid of nothing on the face of the earth or under it. He will tackle a bullock as readily as he will tackle a flea" and *"the big black yellow eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown his wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs as the end of its tail disappears …"*. These excerpts from the text show the physical appearance and strength of the dog. The dog is depicted as big, fearless and strong. The dog is protecting the drover's family. It has killed many snakes. The dog is depicted as the loyal guardian of the drover's family.

Excerpt 3

"*Battle light is in his yellow eyes*" refers to the anger of the dog to attack the snake.

Excerpt 4

The word "*bush*" is repeated many times in the text. *"bush all around— bush with no horizon … bush track."*

Excerpt 5

The author repeated the image of the thunderstorm throughout the text to indicate that the image of thunderstorm represents an important message or value. The author wants to equate the difficulties faced by the drover's

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family with the image of thunderstorm. For example *"the thunderstorm comes on and the wind rushing, through the cracks in the slabs wall, threatens to blow out her candle"*.

Excerpt 6

The author uses *sunset* and *midnight* to show darkness. The author wants to equates darkness to the difficulties faced by the drover's wife during the night because of the snake. "*it is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming*" and "*near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits …*" These excerpts show the difficulties faced by the family. But it all changes when the author deviates from darkness to into new hope by introducing lights. '*It must be daylight now,*' "*battle light is in his yellow eyes*", "*a small bright, bead like eyes glisten*" and "*sickly daylight breaks over the bush.*" They managed to kill the snake when it turns into daylight and Tommy promises that he will never go droving and will look after his siblings and meanwhile helps his mother. The light brings new hope in their lives.

These responses were based on the guidelines that were given to them earlier. These guidelines appeared to have helped them delve deeper into the pattern and choice of words used by the author and to make links with issues that help them understand the content of the story. They were able to notice the repetitive patterns of words, phrases and colours that in turn aided their comprehension of the link to issues such as hope, anger, fear etc. Admittedly, they lack skills in writing gauging from the many grammatical mistakes in their responses but this should not deflect us from noting how they have tried to engage further with the text instead of merely re-telling the story, as many are inclined to do. In this way, they are encouraged to engage with the text on their own as the specific questions connected with this approach has guided them through the text and consequently their establishment of the various patterns of repetition and deviation such as evident in the responses above how students develop their reading skills.

Reading Approach 2 : Reader Response

Excerpt 1

First time I saw the title of this short story "The Drover's Wife" my first horizon of expectation is this must be a story about the life of a woman

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who is a drover's wife. In this story, the writer will be talks about the daily routine of a drover's wife, for example how she takes care of her children and husband. Besides that I also expected that this story will tell us the relationship of this woman with her husband. As I proceeded I realised that the drover has leaved his wife and children, *"The drover, an ex-squatter is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone"*.

Excerpt 2

I found that there is some words that I not familiar with and not understand. Therefore, I go to check the meaning by using the dictionary and search in the internet. In the first and second paragraphs, I was not understand the meaning of the words 'slabs', 'stringy-bark' and 'sheoaks'. Then I go to search the meaning, what I got is 'slab' means a thick and flat wood, 'stringy bark' means tough outer covering of tree trunk and 'sheoaks' means a kind of tree. After I go these meaning, I can imagine how the house looks like and the scenery around the house.

Excerpt 3

After I read the Henry Lawson's biodata, I know that he is an Australian writer and his works always related to the environment in Australia. Most of the Australians who live far away from the city are working as a drover. Actually I was not really understand why Australians like to be a drover, but after I searched the information about the culture and lifestyle of an Australian in the internet, I have more understand towards this story.

Excerpt 4

Through the process of finding meanings, my understanding towards the story also changed. At the beginning I assumed that this is just an ordinary story and nothing special about a woman (a drover's wife) life, but lastly I found that is a story not only talking about the life of a woman who lives without husband, but also how this woman survives and faced the problems in lives. I was very admired the spirit that she has.

Through the process of recording the detailed steps involved in the process of reading the text, the students become more aware of the limitations that they started out with and are led to see how this is consequently expanded through their own initiatives to fill in the gaps that create these limitations. This approach ultimately opens up new worlds and new pathways of understanding different, unfa-

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miliar worlds and cultures. The use of the internet to supplement their reading also speaks of the bridges that are created between the the individual reader, the literary text and the larger worlds that exists outside the original point of reference.

Reading Approach 3 : Psychoanalysis

Excerpt 1

Most parts of the short story indicate that the drover's wife is a nice mother, nice wife and a nice person as well. She is mostly dominated by the moral principle. She seldom selfish and prefers to consider the others feelings and conditions rather than herself first. There are some evidences that support the statement above. "*She gives some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into house and snatches up some pillows and bedclothes- expecting to see or lay a hand on the snake any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children and sits down beside it to watch all night.*"

Excerpt 2

Tommy focuses more on the self : "*Shet up you little -! D'yer want to be bit with the snake? " If yer bit, you'll swell up, an' turn red an' green an' blue all over til yer bust.*" These show that Tommy is using his authority as an elder brother to frighten his younger brother Jacky.

Excerpt 3

"*Mother I won't ever go drovin' blarst m if I do!*, "*will you wake me if the snake comes out?*" Tommy seemed to protect and love his mother.

Excerpt 4

There are some images and figures that are symbolic and represent some meanings in them. First is the snake. It indicates something which is poisonous, evil, harmful, death and scary. "*A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died.*" The Drover's wife really wants to kill the snake because it indicates negative effects.

Excerpt 5

Dog indicates big, kind, helpful, loyal and brave. "*Alligator takes small notice of this proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.*" The dog is

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indicating positive effects. Hence the whole family appreciates the dog very much.

Excerpt 6

Different colours indicate different things also. Black symbolises evil, darkness, frightening, mystery, chaos, and hopeless. The black indicates negative elements. The red symbolises hope blood and bright. The red indicates the elements which are more positive compared to the black. The thunderstorm indicates noisy, frightening, uncomfortable and impatient.

The excerpts above indicate the beginning of an awareness of details connected to characterisation and context within a literary text. By focusing on details in dialogue, setting, descriptions, students gain a better insight into individual characters as well as relevant devices such as symbols that are used to reinforce the tone and mood of the story. While there are a host of other issues that they could have delved deeper into, these excerpts serve as a testimony to their initiation into the complex world of characterisation as they studied the ways in which individual character engaged with other characters as well as the environment as depicted within the text.

Reading Approach 4 : Feminism

Excerpt 1

The title itself has shown a nameless female character by using "The Drover's Wife" instead of a name of her own. The character of the female appears to be tied to the relationship with the male character. … She is confined to a traditional female image as the mother to the children and the wife of a drover.

Excerpt 2

Gender stereotyping is clearly reflected in the story. Both the character of the drover and his wife are fixed in certain role. These two character contain as expected gender role as the male character is out to earn a living while the female character has to stay at home

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Excerpt 3

She killed the snake after so much oppression and struggle. Her overt urgency was strongly depicted through her action while she was hitting the snake.

Excerpt 4

She has to struggle through her daily life in such challenging condition in spite that she is only an ordinary woman. I have deep sympathy for her uphill struggle against poverty and at the same time being repressed by this male dominant society.

The excerpts above show a certain degree of awareness of differences in gender roles based on the scenes studied. While the students have pointed out how oppressed the situation of the drover's wife is by taking into consideration the struggles that she undergoes, they also recognise certain modes of resistance on her part and see the killing of the snake as one indication of this. When they approach the text from this angle of gender, they are able to understand how most gender roles are socially constructed and that literary texts can be used as a mirror in which to view the complexities that arise as result.

Students' Reflections on Using Four Reading Approaches to the Same Text

At the end of the reading folio that collated all the responses above, the students were asked to write a one-page reflection on the overall experience of working on the folio and the advantages of approaching a text from different reading perspectives and this is what group 6 had to say:

We now have a better understanding in the various approach that we have to deal with. We do not only improve in our specific reading approach but other reading approaches too. We can now apply the various reading approach in the literature text and understand why each text is constructed the way it is written. Being able to look at the text in a different perspective helps us to be a critical reader rather than a passive reader. Most importantly, we have obtain a fundamental grasp of a variety of reading approaches and the way they can be applied in reading literary text with the objective of discovering various possibilities in understanding literature.

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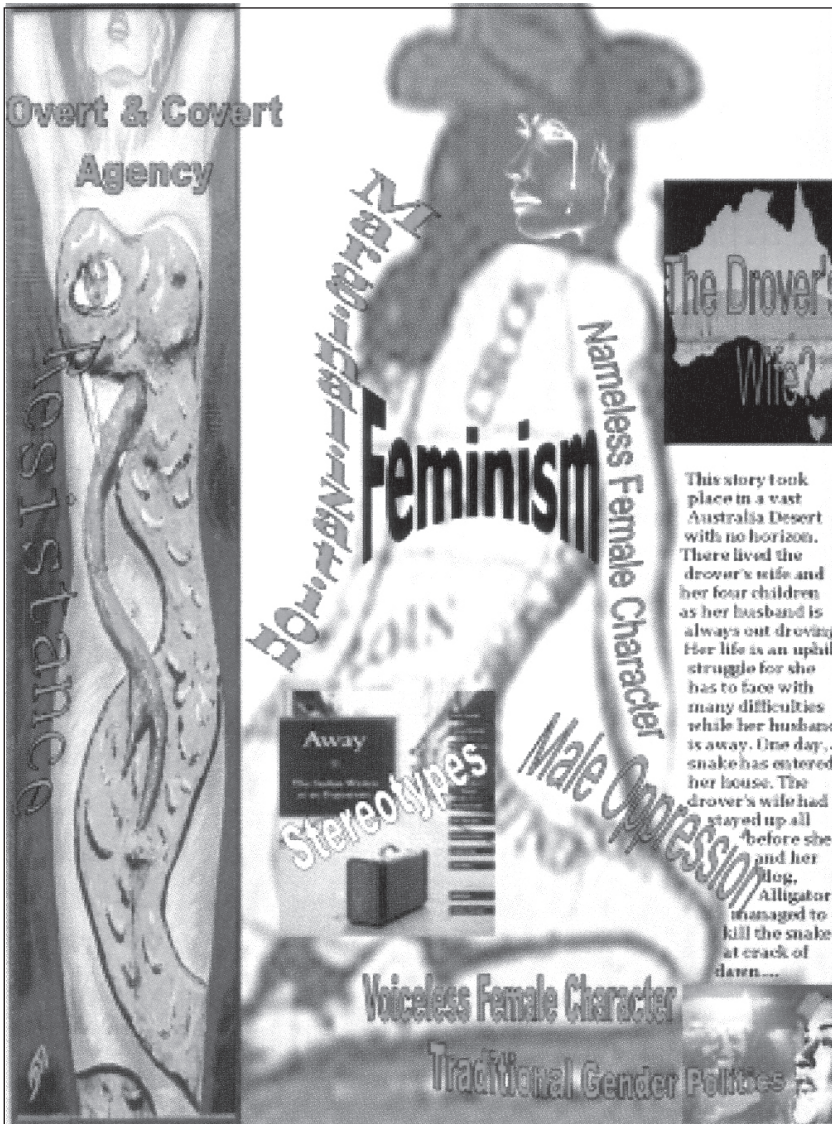
Apart from the folio, students were also asked to visualise their reading of the short story from the angle of any one of the four approaches and to present it as creatively as possible in the form of a poster. They were told to think of specific images that would best illustrate the various issues connected with the selected reading approach. The group in question decided on the fourth reading approach with its focus on gender and the following illustration is the poster that they created:

The poster reflects the creative ability of the students to visualise their reading and the key aspects of the reading approach chosen. Interesting concepts were highlighted such as the stereotype of the serpent and the sinful woman, the woman on her knees and the superimposed tearful face, both indication of the oppression of women and the glimmer of hope placed at the edge of the poster created. It must be said that most of the students in the class enjoyed the creation of the multimedia poster the best and this can be another pathway into enhancing the reading experience in the classroom, especially as we deal with a media generation that focuses on things visual and vivid.

Conclusion : Implications of the Various Reading Approaches

There are a number of implications that can be gleaned from the incorporation of the various reading approaches discussed above. Firstly, they created a whole new avenue for students to develop their reading skills. What they were given were guiding questions to help their entry into the text and with these they learnt to articulate their responses in a structured way. Consequently, they also learnt to move away from merely summarising the plot and identifying the names of characters and instead were guided into looking at the whole process of writing a literary text and the significance of the choice of words and phrases. Apart from the above, they learnt to link what they gathered from their reading to the larger context of the world in which they lived and those of other cultures that they could access through their readings.

The ways in which they articulated their responses in writing is another matter altogether as the excerpts illustrated above clearly show poor grammatical structures and a lack of skill in articulation, a matter that will make for another paper in the near future. However, this should not tarnish the larger and more significant message, that pathways towards generating possibilities of reading skills in students, no matter the proficiency, can be promising, with the introduction of these various reading approaches as well as the various assessments of their reading responses in both writing as well as visual tasks. Ultimately, the study of the latter especially

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revealed that students need structured routes into the reading world, especially with regard to literary texts, which are more often than not seen as daunting tasks. When these pathways are initiated, they are able to open up a multifarious world where learners are able not only to develop their reading skills but also participate in the development of their own creative and cognitive abilities. As Tobin (2006) puts it,

> *As language users engage in a discourse, they have a view of several different aspects of the activity in which they are participating. The participants in the discourse, their roles, their relationships to one another, the genre(s) of discourse they are taking themselves to be engaged in, the setting in which the discourse is taking place, and the status of what they can take to be common ground between them are all elements of the discourse situation they understand themselves to be interacting within. These elements of discourse situations exist in the physical world, outside of the minds of the participants [...]but it is in the participants' conceptualizations of those circumstances that they are meaningful as situations, and, as with any conceptual content, discourse situations can be framed (Goffman, 1974; Fillmore, 1982) in a variety of different ways (76).*

The various conceptualisations of the reading experience that took shape in the tutorials, the folios and the multimedia posters offered the readers various pathways in which they could actively participate and cleave out new worlds through the various aspects generated by the frameworks of the reading approaches introduced to them. Lastly, it must be pointed out as well that though this article has focused on the reading responses of tertiary students, the various reading tasks and modes of assessment presented can be significantly employed, with appropriate modifications, in the primary and secondary schools as well. The reality of reading need not necessarily be bleak if one is able to formulate spaces in which to ease learners into a more accessible plane, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this article.

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	• insight and understanding about ELT research and its application to the classroom
	• procedures to be implemented in classrooms with a variety of students
		Consideration of new theoretical perspectives, syntheses of research, discussions of methodological issues and scholarly analyses of issues in ELT:
		• Scholarship focused on theoretical or research topics
		  1. Investigating alternative modes of research
		  2. Debates on a variety of perspectives, policies and theories
		  3. Examination of trends in ELT
		  4. Advancing knowledge and understanding of ELT in broadly defined areas

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4. Examples of titles of articles	• Developing Oral Skills among Low English Proficiency Students • Teachers' Views on Large Classes and Mixed Ability Students • Ideas for Incorporating Critical Thinking Skills in ESL Lessons • Using Reading Circles in the Literature Classrooms	• Current Trends in Second Language Literacy Research • ESL Instruction in Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia • The Role of Mentors in ESL Teacher Education • The Relationship between Cognitive Strategy Knowledge and Reading Proficiency
5. Mode	• Print-based • Published once a year	• Online Journal • Ongoing publication
6. Number of pages	10-12 pages, single spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, excluding references and appendices	15-20 pages, single spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, excluding references and appendices

Format and Content of Manuscripts

1. All articles submitted must be original materials not under consideration or published elsewhere.

2. Authors must use spelling and punctuation that is common to written communication in the UK.

3. Manuscripts may be submitted via e-mail to the MELTA office.

4. The cover page should include:
   a. A title.
   b. Name and institutional affiliation of each author as you would like it to appear in the published version and contact information (full mailing address, telephone/ fax numbers and e-mail address).

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5.   The second page should include the title and an abstract of <u>not more than</u> 120 words.

6.   The article should begin on the third page.

7.   All references and citations should be checked for accuracy and spelling, and follow the APA format. References in the main text should not be different from those in the reference section.

8.   Articles for ***Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*** that contain quantitative or qualitative analysis or survey research must follow research conventions strictly.

Annual Timeline for Publication of Manuscripts

For all MELTA journals, authors must allow for at least 9 months for the full process of review, revision and publication to take place, as detailed below.

1.   Manuscript Submission: January-March (3months)
2.   Review by Editorial Board: April-May (2 months)
3.   Revisions by authors: June (1 month)
4.   Second review by Editorial Board: July (1 month)
5.   Projected date of Publication: September of the same year.

END