



Straits Talking

The CPD newsletter of Straits International School

Issue 5: Developing Reading Skills

June 2017

Welcome

Following our exploration of the use of oracy in the classroom during the Autumn term, our whole-school focus for pedagogical development last term was the improvement of reading skills across the range of age and ability. We investigated three aspects of reading: the ways in which independent reading and research can enhance classroom learning; the use of strategies designed to develop deeper reading skills; the ways in which directed activities relating to texts can enable students to access and interpret texts across the curriculum. In this issue of *Straits Talking*, you will find our reflections on a selection of strategies tried. For example, you can read about the development of inferential reading of media texts in a Year 2 class. You can also learn more about how a more developed framework for learning through was used in Art through prior investigative work. And you can read about strategies used to mediate between texts and learners with learners of all ages. As always, our strategies were tested in the classroom and refined through collaboration and peer observation. Enjoy reading.

Our focus upon developing literacy skills moves forward. In the next issue of *Straits Talking*, you will find insightful reflections upon the development of writing skills by a different team of SIS teachers!



Andrew Crompton

Head of Secondary

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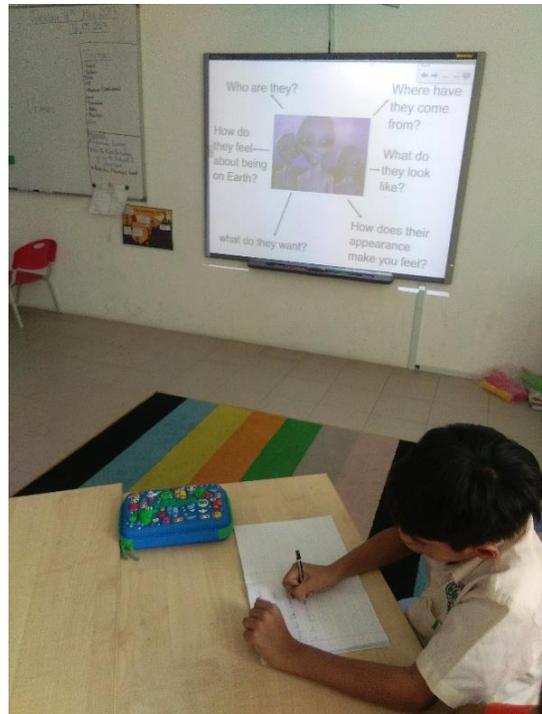
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Using Inference Through Silent Movies to Develop Reading Comprehension

This term, our school CPD has been based upon the fundamental skill of reading. Reading is a key aspect of any child's, or adult's, development. Not only does it help to develop a wider range of vocabulary but it also allows the opportunity to ripen and broaden imagination. The term 'get lost in a book' is heard so frequently nowadays because it has become so easy to read. You can now read on a beach, on a plane, in a car, without having to physically pick up a book. E-readers and tablets with reading apps have provided a platform to allow everybody the opportunity to read.

At Straits, reading is valued as much as speaking and writing. This is why particular focus was given to enriching reading skills through a variety of methods. It is one thing to read the words on a page and say you have read a book but it is another to have actually understood what you have read. That is why this term I decided to focus on developing Year 2 learners' comprehension skills. I did this through the use of inference where the children had to reach a conclusion about what had happened based on their interpretations.

As a general rule of thumb, children react well to visual learning. With this in mind, I chose to show the pupils short silent movies created by Pixar. The content of the movies varied from animals being the subject, to people and even, in one case, clouds. The first time I tried this, I asked the children just to watch the movie. Afterwards, I asked them a series of questions in order to assess their level of understanding and comprehension.



As with many classroom investigations, the first time did not go to plan. The children were able to retell the story of what they had watched but were unable to answer questions that required a deeper interpretation and thought process. However, with a bit of trial and error the pupils soon understood what was expected from them during this activity.

Examples of some of the questions asked are as follows:

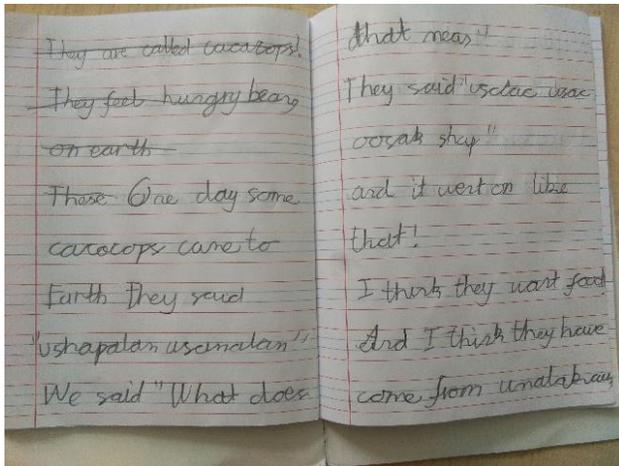
Initial questioning

- What happened in the movie?
- Who was the main character?
- Did it have a happy ending?
- Did you like the movie?

Secondary questioning

- How do you think the characters were feeling?
- Where do you think the movie was set?
- Why do you think the characters reacted that way?
- Why did you like the movie?
- How did the movie make you feel?

These questions proved not only to help with the learners' understanding of the movies but also with their comprehension of the books that they were reading. The questions were then transferred into reading sessions. Instead of picking up on visual cues to determine aspects of the movies learners were able to find key words within the text.



Useful links for Pixar silent movies:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1cFYctfO7s> - Partly Cloudy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4Dnm6dkOVI> - Presto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVL0c6FrLiQ> - Lifted



Ms. Hannah Warlow

The Flipped Classroom in Art and Design

The biggest challenge during Art and Design lessons is to improve students' confidence in their drawing and painting skills. As their teacher, I try my best to develop their confidence by applying a few techniques during lessons.

The term *flipped classroom* was popularised by teachers Aaron Sams and John Bergman from Woodland Park High School, Colorado in 2007, as they grew to understand that class time would be best spent guiding knowledge and providing feedback rather than delivering direct instruction. Thus, they developed a learning programme designed to enable students to prepare for learning before lessons and consolidate their learning independently after lessons.

This term, I explored and applied this strategy with my Year 10 IGCSE Art and Design class. Their main topic is about *rendering*, or painting their design using watercolour paints. Their focus here was to get their design proportion, shape, shadow, value and colour matching in correct order. To complete this task I posted a tutorial video on Edmodo, our online platform for independent and interactive learning, and I asked students to watch it and complete their painting process while watching it.



Promoting Early Literacy - Reading Development for Young Learners

One of my CPD presentations focused on **Reading** with some effective strategies to build and strengthen literacy skills in reading, print awareness, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Some of these strategies included: teacher-led group reading; student-led group reading; reading independently; paired reading; individual guided reading with the teacher.

Reading books to children is one of the most important things you can do to promote literacy development.



Student-led group reading

Here are some creative strategies to foster your children's love of reading not just at school but also at home.

1. A classroom reading corner - is an invaluable reading resource. It encourages independent reading; or acquaints your budding reader with book swapping or the book loaning processes, emphasising a respect for the facility and the books. It helps students become engaged readers when they make full use of the school book facilities, resources and services.

As Sams and Bergman discovered, I realised certain benefits of this approach. Firstly, the use of the video enabled an introduction to the focus of the lesson and 'warmed up' their approach to learning. Importantly, the simple independent activity allowed opportunities for repeated viewing; this had a definite effect upon levels of confidence. Finally, the activity increased time spent learning. Of course, certain issues arose which I am continuing to consider – for example, how to ensure that I can guide students as they produce their art and opportunities for collaboration between students. However, after a few weeks of practising, the test results and the exam result showed that most of my Year 10 IGCSE art students have improved their skill in art and also able to define correct techniques to use in their work . I am delighted with their progress.



Mr Shahrul Hasfis



2. Imaginary book story telling - a creative way of reading that also makes the children excited. They can also use and enhance their imagination and thinking skills.
3. Dramatisation of the story - while reading any kind of books add a little play acting and even dress up - Instead of just reciting the same old story, improvise a little. Don't be afraid to deviate from what's on the page. Incorporate different accents for the characters, add props, create drama with theatrical hand gestures, build anticipation by including pauses and emotions.



Dressing up as characters from books

4. Encourage interaction - when reading to your children, pause every now and then to ask questions about the story, wonder aloud about alternate endings or propose new character names.
5. Talk about the books - the benefits of reading to children don't have to stop after you've

closed the book. After sharing a story together, bring it up in conversation throughout the day. Compare a real-life event to something that happened in the book, or ask how they think a certain character would handle a specific situation. Incorporate key vocabulary that was presented in the book, so your child gets an idea of how the words fit into different contexts.

6. Introduce books in new scenarios - why wait until bedtime, story time or library time to pull out a book? For young learners, meal times and picnics in the playground provide some great opportunities for enjoying a story not just at school.



Individual and group online reading

7. Consider joining a book club for children - with the overwhelming number of kids' books on the market, it can seem like a daunting task to select the ones that are right for your child. When you join a book club for children, you'll receive hand-picked titles tailored to your child's age and interests. Getting shipments of a high-quality children's books delivered right to your doorstep is a great way to encourage excitement about reading.
8. Explore reading resources for children. The internet offers an abundance of children's websites with creative ideas for promoting early literacy, fun literacy games, create own story book and reading tools for children.
9. Encourage reading outside of books - throughout a typical day, there are hundreds of

opportunities to recognise words and phrases. Challenge your child to find new mediums for reading, whether it's a cereal box, billboard, newspaper, road sign or storefront sign. This will help your child grasp the significance of reading in the real world and give him or her a chance to show what has been learned.

10. Introduce your own childhood favourite stories. Remember those timeless classics you couldn't get enough of as a kid? Bring them back into the frame by reading them to your own child. Your excitement for those old beloved stories is sure to rub off on your little one.
11. Parent reading volunteers - it would be wonderful for parents to volunteer to come to class and read a book to the students using their mother tongue with English translation. In this way we can embrace our Round Square Internationalism values.



Independent reading

The importance of reading to children can't be disputed. By utilising literacy resources for children, incorporating books as part of your child's everyday routine, and looking for creative ways to promote reading, you'll be giving your youngster a head start toward academic success and a rich, vivid imagination.

Strategies to Promote Deeper Reading in History

In order to prepare our students for the challenges of external examinations, and indeed for the rigours of higher education, it is imperative that they are taught to be critical thinkers. The study of history enables students to become better at thinking critically. In History, students are required to sort, classify, sequence, compare, contrast, and to analyse information; they use creative thinking skills to generate ideas and solve problems; they evaluate information and make judgments based on reasoning. Students are only able to develop such critical thinking skills if they are taught to read deeply. In contrast to *surface reading* where students skim and scan for information, reading more deeply involves higher-order cognitive skills such as the ability to analyse, synthesise and solve problems. I therefore set about developing strategies to promote deeper reading, and thereby critical thinking, in my History lessons.

Thus, I determined two priorities. Firstly, I wanted students to develop their inference skills. Additionally, I was keen to ensure that students refined their abilities to explore texts in depth.

Making inferences is a key skill that students need to develop in History. Students are required to access information that is not explicit from a range of different types of sources of evidence, in order to investigate historical people, events and time periods. Inference relies on accessing the students' own internal schema – the prior knowledge or process for making sense of the world and texts - in order for them to extract the indirect or implied meaning of a text. Accessing this schema allows the pupils to construct meaning from textual clues which are not directly obvious.



Ms. Arlene Binger



Strategies previously used to guide students to making inferences from sources were adapted to mirror those used in English, in order to promote cross-curricular skills and embed the techniques further. I first used these strategies with my Year 8 students who were studying the Black Civil Rights movement in America.

In order to activate the background schema, students were first given a photograph and told to think about the feelings of the people involved in the photo and write 5 key words; they also had to write down what types of action were being taken by black people in 1960s USA to improve their lives. This led to feedback from different students and a brief discussion. This was followed up with a strategy that involved students making inferences at a more advanced level, this time using a poem as an historical source. The poem was stuck in the centre of a large piece of paper and constructed as an 'OWI' chart – 'Observe, Wonder, Infer'. Students were put into pairs to analyse the poem in the following ways:

- **Observe:** Students first highlighted any key words and phrases that they thought would help them to understand the poet's thoughts and feelings about being a black woman in the 1960s.
- **Wonder:** They then used words that they highlighted as a stimulus to asking specific questions that would help them to understand

what life was like for a black woman in America at this time.

- **Infer:** Students then made inferences linked to the key words highlighted and the questions raised.



Finally, students were asked to use their ideas from the paired activity to answer specific questions.

I found that the strategies I used to develop inferential skills had several benefits. Firstly, the use of the same strategy employed in English meant that students were familiar and more confident – less explanation was therefore needed. Importantly, the OWI chart meant that students were engaged with the source and this helped them to access the emotional impact of the inequalities experienced by black people. Significantly, there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of students' responses to inference tasks, as shown in the outcomes of individual assessments completed shortly afterwards.

Another strategy I employed in my lessons to develop a deeper reading of texts was that of 'mysteries'. In this strategy, students are given a central question as a focus. This is deliberately ambiguous, such that no single answer is correct. They are then given between 16 and 25 pieces of paper with specific information on each. Some may be deliberately irrelevant to the question. A close reading of each piece of information is necessary. Students need to reread the information

several times in order to decide its relevance, or not, and also its relationship to the other pieces of information.

I introduced a mystery to my Year 9 classes, which worked as follows: the starter task had been to make inferences from a photograph that showed the signing of the armistice, from which came the central question, 'Why did Germany sign an armistice in 1918?' Students then worked in mixed ability groups of 3. They were given 23 statements of information which they were told to categorise, thinking through their own appropriate names for each category. They were told to focus on the central question and discard any statements they decided were irrelevant to the question. As a group they created a mind-map, including links between factors; groups were then asked to feedback their findings in a whole-class discussion.

I found that the mystery strategy had several strengths. Importantly, this strategy ensured a deeper reading, as students were required to read the information several times in order to make sense of it and how it related both to the central question and to the other statements. A collaborative approach in this task also encouraged risk taking, as did the fact that there is more than one way to approach answering the question. Additionally, a collaborative approach meant that students worked with each other to understand tricky words and concepts – learning through talk and context. Quite clearly, students engaged in higher order thinking skills and gained a good knowledge and understanding of the factors that contributed to Germany asking for an armistice.

Whilst there were many advantages to using the mystery strategy there were the following weaknesses observed. Firstly, some students inadvertently discarded some relevant information as irrelevant, though this was addressed in the class discussion. Also, some students did find that there was too much information for them to make sense of and needed

more teacher intervention to refocus them on the central question.

Overall, the strategies used for both developing inference skills and deeper reading skills had far more advantages than disadvantages; such strategies ensured that students were involved in the following: information processing; reasoning; enquiry; creative thinking; risk-taking and evaluation. In this way, students were involved in thinking, discussing and writing at a much higher level than is required of other tasks, and continued use of such strategies will mean that students will undoubtedly become more confident and able critical thinkers, able to tackle the most challenging of tasks successfully.



Ms. Janet Crompton

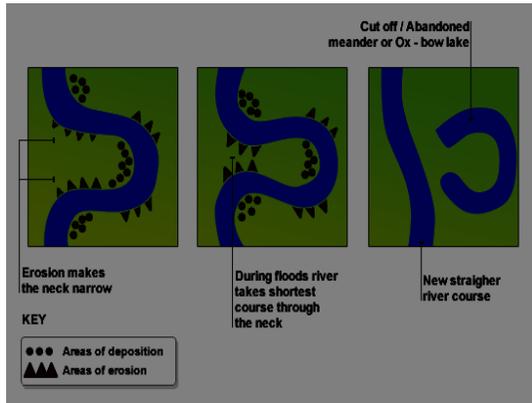
Directed Activities Relating to Texts in Geography

Here at Straits, we are always looking for ways to push ourselves even further as practitioners of education. Last term, we investigated and collaborated in ways to improve the literacy of our students and to make literacy tasks at school more exciting.

One of the strategies that we explored was the use of imagery to assist understanding. For example, after reading texts, students will then match up photos that relate to the text that they have just read. Research shows that when visual cues are presented simultaneously alongside with texts the retention rate of those texts increases dramatically. In addition, the use of visual clues also allows for collaborative tasks with other students which also increases retention.

A method that I use to develop an understanding of geographical processes in my Secondary lessons is sequencing. Students persistently have issues with recollecting a sequence of events in a particular order. With sequencing, the order of events is split up into more rudimentary sections which students are able to

remember. In addition, visual clues can also be presented simultaneously to also aid with retention.



Larger sediment is dropped closer to the channel. The finer sediment is carried out further from the river channel before being deposited. Most sediment is deposited near the channel and as you move away from the channel less is deposited

The river returns to its channel after the flood

The river flows normally in its channel

The river floods again and the process repeats. The levees get bigger

The river floods its banks and covers the floodplain

Through these two examples and many others, we are beginning to see notable progress with the literacy level of many students. With our continued efforts from all staff across the board, we believe that improved literacy will result in better overall results for our students and a more enjoyable experience with at Straits International.



Mr. Jeffrey Elliott

Mapping from Memory in Mandarin lessons

DARTs (directed activities related to texts) are activities which get students to interact with texts. In using DARTs, we can improve students' reading comprehension and enable them to be critical readers.

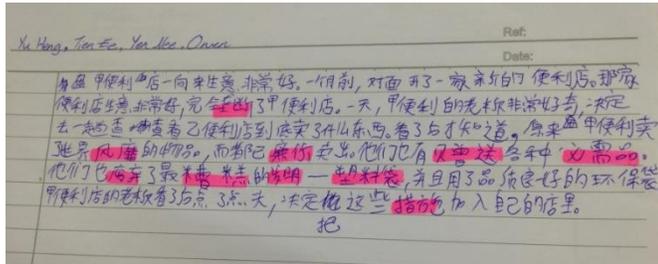
One such text-related activity is *Mapping from Memory*, a reconstruction and analysis activity. This strategy requires students to reconstruct a text or diagram. Students then categorise and interpret information by marking or labelling a text or diagram as an additional preface to more detailed exploration of the text.

I used this strategy with year 7 to 9 students. The strategy allowed me to introduce many pieces of vocabulary relating to the topic that would be explored. The challenge presented to students was to interpret the meanings and understand pronunciation of the words during 10 minutes of discussion time. After that, I announced the correct meanings of the vocabulary. Students were required to submit the correct answer and read correctly. It allowed them fast and focused active engagement with ideas that were later explored in a topic and it provided a close focus upon the most important vocabulary.

After the competition, students chose 10 words or phrases to create a short piece of short writing of around 100 words which they then presented



creatively in the class. For their presentations, some students chose a range of formats - TV news broadcasting, drama, radio programmes - to demonstrate engaging and creative interpretations.



Through this experience, I realised that when students interact with texts, they become more confident in and sensitive readers. The activity also trains students' listening, speaking and writing skills.



Ms. Pang Sook Yee

Talk for writing in Reception Classes

In the early years setting, it is important to build up the student's vocabulary before asking them to write or retell a story.

One of the strategies that I have used in the classroom is *Talk for Writing*. *Talk for Writing* was introduced by Pie Corbett who is an author, storyteller and educational consultant. He has worked on this for the past 40 years and it is based on a very simple notion that "you can't write sentences unless you have said them and you can't say them unless you have heard them."

Talk for writing has three stages. The first stage is the imitation stage; the second stage is the innovation stage and the third and final stage is independent application.

The imitation stage

Once the teacher has built up an interesting context and a pleasing start, a usual Talk for Writing session would start with some hands-on activities such as learning the 'melody' of the writing and its main topic. This is to assist students to adopt the pattern of the language required. This is usually done by reading out loud a story with the support of visual aids such as text maps and also movement to allow students to better remember the story. From this, students can hear the story, say it out loud and appreciate the story before writing them down. Once students have adopted language of the text, they are able to read the story and start to analyse the important ingredient that make the story work. Some example of the imitation stage can be seen below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdvJZD-cplg&list=PLB09BB1283994549E> – *The Little Red Hen*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeSrGtxoGSA> – *The Three Little Pigs*

The innovation stage

Once they have learnt about the story, learners are then prepared to begin transforming the pattern of the text. This can be done by having more advanced warm-up activities such as listing the key words and phrases in the story. Younger students and writers who are less confident can change their text maps and rehearse orally what they choose to say and then create their own version. The main focus in this activity is shared writing, guiding the children to create their own story by 'doing one together' first. This stage allows students to see how they can be innovative in generating words that can be used. This process allows students to write a new version of their own story by developing their skills to produce phrases and good words. Also, it will help students to develop the skills to select why one word or phrase is the best. Teachers can support this stage by creating flip-charts on words and phrases selected. These can be put on 'washing

lines' in the classroom so that when they are ready to write they have something that they can refer to. For the older children, they can swap their work with their peers. Then together with a visualizer they can discuss their work. Below is a useful link that you can see on how to support in this stage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8-aToC3brc&t=4s> - Talking for writing across the Curriculum

The invention/independent application stage

At this stage, the teacher can check the children's work and make changes to their planning according to their abilities. This stage could also start with some activities that help the children to focus on the difficulty that they faced while writing. They can also have a go at writing the work again after learning about the difficulties that they faced during their first attempt. The focus for this stage is on the next step needed to support progress to enable the children to be independent speakers and writers. Teachers work with students to set achievable targets at this stage. At the end of this stage, students will have responded to their partner and used classroom discussion to allow them to reflect upon and edit their work.

In my class, we tried the Talk for Writing strategy with the story of *Three Little Pigs*. I started with reading the story to the children then allowing the children to watch the story again on the interactive whiteboard. As a class, we recited the story with actions. I realised that using the actions allows students who are low in English to understand the story and they could contribute to the story by giving suggestions of different kinds of actions. All the students were engaged in the story and they could remember the story better through the actions.

I also tried the innovation stage with the students by changing the content of the story. The title of our story was *The Three Little Cows*. I could see the students

enjoying changing the story and creating actions to go with the story. They took charge of the whole story as they felt that this story belonged to them. At the innovation stage, there is no right or wrong to writing a story; it is all in their imagination. My lower level students could contribute to the story even though they have limited vocabulary as they only need to mention one or two words to change their story.

I personally would suggest talk for writing to children in Reception as a stimulus for writing. Just as Pie Corbett has mentioned, you can't write sentences unless you have said them and you can't say them unless you have heard them.

References:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej-UHjxmHC8> - Talk for Writing in today's school.



Ms. Serene Tan



