

# The English Teacher

# The English Teacher

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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-representation, 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 construction 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 definition 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 Washington 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. Malaysia 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.*

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 exempted 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 Malaysianness, 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

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-

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, tolerance, 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 definition, 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

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 Identifying 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).

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

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

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

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

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. Multiculturalism 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 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 classrooms. 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 classroom. 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 everyday 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' imagination. 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). Students 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 teachers, 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.

### **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 sub-categories. 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.

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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 furred

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

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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?

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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'?

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

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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-

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

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

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?

*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.

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 are 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 practitioners 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

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.

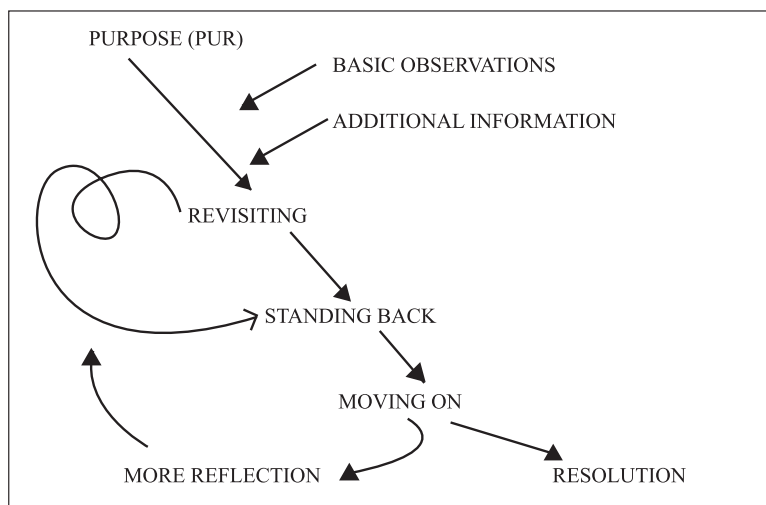


Figure 1: (Simplified Version of Moon's (1999b) model; King: 2002)

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

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

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.

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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What teaching problem(s) am I facing now?</li> <li>2. What problem(s) are my students facing now?</li> </ol>
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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What factors are contributing to this problem?</li> <li>2. What are the significant factors that are contributing to this problem?</li> <li>3. What do I normally do to tackle this problem?</li> <li>4. Have I used the same approach before in the past?</li> <li>5. IF yes, why isn't it effective?</li> </ol>

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why did I intervene as I did?</li> <li>2. What was I trying to accomplish?</li> <li>3. Was my method/ approach effective?</li> <li>4. If yes, how?</li> <li>5. If no, why not?</li> <li>6. What factors influenced my decision-making?</li> <li>7. How did my colleagues or students react to the approach?</li> </ol>
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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the various ways I could tackle this problem?</li> <li>2. What will be the consequences of this action?</li> </ol>

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?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do I feel about this decision?</li> <li>2. How have I made sense of this experience in light of past practices and future possibilities?</li> <li>3. Has this experiences changed the path of my development as a teacher?</li> </ol>
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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How effective is this approach?</li> <li>2. How can this approach be improved?</li> <li>3. How do my students react with this approach?</li> <li>4. How do I feel about this experience?</li> </ol>

## **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

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

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).

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

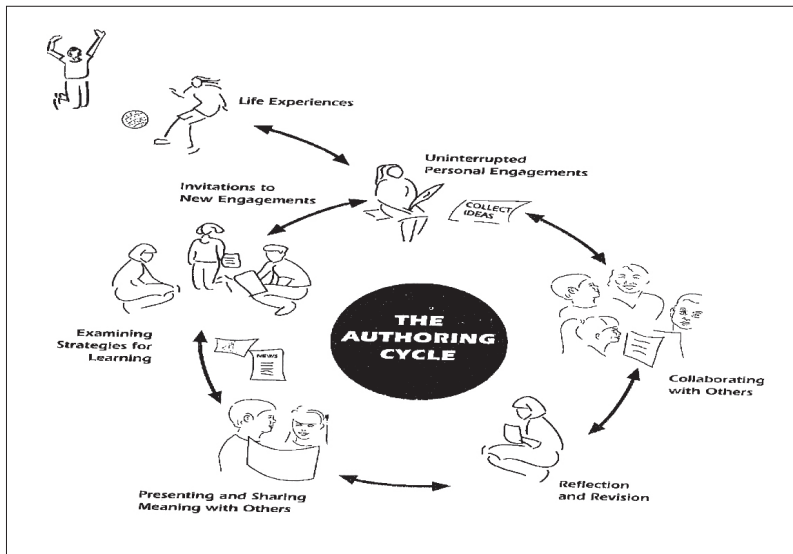


Figure 1: Authoring Cycle (Harste *et al.*, 1988)

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).

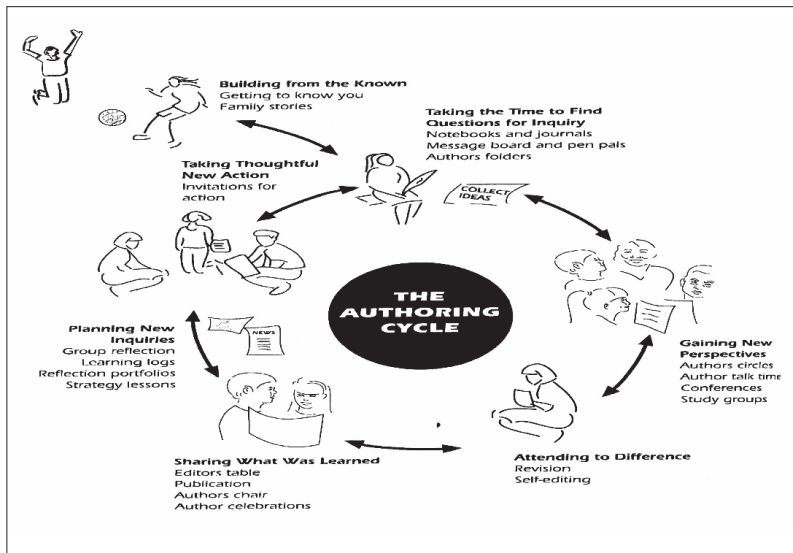


Figure 2: The Authoring Cycle (Short *et al.*, 1996)

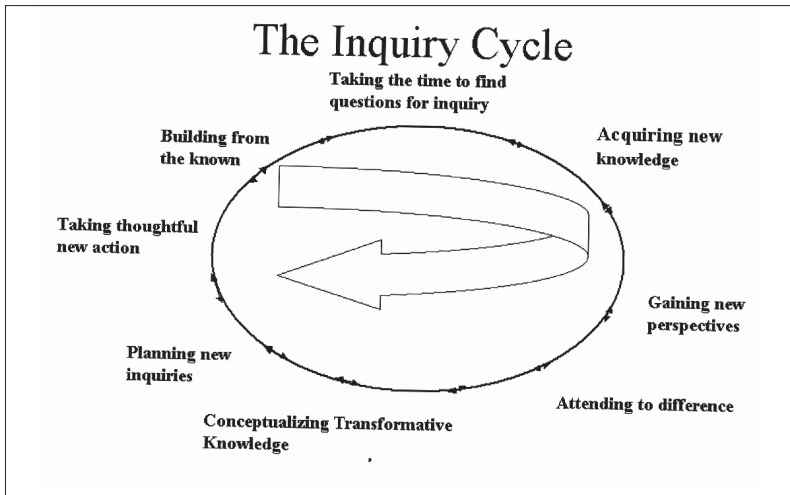


Figure 3 : The Emergent Inquiry Cycle

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 knowledge 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 concerning 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 currently 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 perspectives, 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 underlying 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

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<sup>1</sup>' 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. However, teachers should explicitly tell students what they expect to evaluate.
How could students inquire if they only have limited English?	<p>❖ Li-Ting suggested that the teacher could allow for 15-20 minutes at the end for L1 time. Students could express freely using L1.</p> <p>❖ 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.</p>
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.

Language classes are chunked into pieces of periods, such as speech, listening, novel reading, or writing.

Inquiry-based curriculum provides diversified education.

- ❖ Teachers should do invitations before students start their personal inquiry.
- ❖ We should collaborate with different language-skill teachers to engage our students in an on-going, integrated, meaningful curriculum.
- ❖ Learners should be encouraged to go beyond their inquiry within certain areas so that they won't be limited by their scope of knowledge.

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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 together 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).

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.

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-

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

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 revived 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)**

- <sup>1</sup> 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.