

Chapter 46

The Impact of Blogging and Scaffolding on Primary School Pupils' Narrative Writing: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Narrative writing is a skill that all primary (elementary) school pupils in Singapore are required to develop in their learning of the English language. However, this is an area in which not all pupils excel. This study investigates if the use of blogging and scaffolding can improve pupils' narrative writing. Data were gathered from 36 primary five (grade five) pupils through pre-post writing tests, reflection sheets, and interviews. The pre-post writing tests were administered before and after the pupils had completed their blogging activities, while the blogs were used to draft their narrative writings and to comment on their peers' writings. The teacher also used a writing guide that served as a scaffold to help pupils plan their writing on their blogs. Overall, results showed a statistically significant difference of medium effect size between the pre-post test scores. Pupils' perceptions of using blogs as a tool for writing were also explored.

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Literacy and Narrative Writing

Reading and writing form the foundation of education, and are basically required for all academic disciplines, including mathematics and science (Cassell, 2004). Often referred to as verbal literacy, children begin developing reading and writing skills even before they attend school (Huffaker, 2004). In order to have success throughout life, verbal literacy is crucial and especially so from the beginnings of education to the future employment of adults (Cassell, 2004).

In Singapore, the primary education system consists of a six-year program: a four-year foundation stage from primary (grade) 1 to 4 and a two-year orientation stage from primary 5 to 6 (Ministry of Education, 2010). One of the overall aims of the Singapore primary education is to give pupils a good grasp of the English Language. Literacy development such as reading and writing is at the heart of the English Language instructional programme in Singapore schools (Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD), 2001). As indicated in the 2001 English Language Syllabus (CPDD, 2001, p. 2):

English is one of four official languages in Singapore. As the language of public administration, education, commerce, science and technology, and global communication, it has become the medium by which most Singaporeans gain access to information and knowledge from around the world. The ability to speak and write English effectively, therefore, has become an essential skill in the workplace, and a mastery of English is vital to Singapore's pupils.

At the end of their primary school education, pupils in Singapore are required to understand the grammatical features for the text type of narratives and be able to carry out narrative writing. They

will also be assessed informally and formally in their narrative writing skills during class practices, school-level or national level examinations (CPDD, 2001). Please note that narrative writing is one of the many learning outcomes of the English Language education. Other learning outcomes include reading comprehension, listening, and oral presentations.

According to Derewianka (1990), there are many types of writing genre and narrative writing is one of them. Narratives are recounts with a twist in them. The basic aim of narrative writing is to entertain the reader through gaining and holding the reader's interest in a story. Narratives may also attempt to teach or inform, to embody the writer's reflections or experience, and to nourish and extend the reader's imagination. There are many types of narratives, including: fairy stories, mysteries, science fiction, choose-your-own-adventures, romances, horror stories, heroes and villains (e.g., TV cartoons), adventure stories, parables, fables and moral tales, myths, and legends. The main focus of a narrative text is on a sequence of actions and narratives usually begin with an orientation, where the writer introduces the setting or background of the story.

Narratives may have a major complication which is not resolved until the end, together with a number of minor complications which might be resolved in part or whole as they arise during the course of the story. These minor complications are usually related to the major complication and serve to sustain the interest and suspense of the reader, leading to a crisis or climax. The language features of narratives often include: specific participants with defined identities, action verbs that refers to action (e.g., run, hide, walk, etc.), verbs which refer to what human participants said, felt, or thought, words in past tense, many linking words to do with time, dialogue, descriptive language, writing as the first person (i.e., I, we) narrating the story, or writing in the third person (i.e., he, she, they) narrating the story (Derewianka, 1990).

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