EL Classroom
inquiry

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Contents

Discovering the Joy of Reading

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Reading for pleasure is important for language learning and personal development (Clark & Rumbolt, 2006). A team of English Language teachers observed that their Secondary 1 to 3 students had low reading interest and needed to be encouraged to read. The team inquired into how these reluctant readers could be motivated to read. They designed an extensive reading programme guided by their analysis of their students' reading interests and preferences. The programme included using varied reading resources, teacher role modelling of reading, and students' personal response. The data gathered showed that the students' attitude towards reading improved. Their interest in reading was kindled and they responded positively to the reading experiences they engaged in. The students also valued the advantages of reading. The extensive reading programme was effective in motivating students to read for pleasure.

Background

At the beginning of 2018, English Language (EL) teachers from Northbrooks Secondary School participated in ELIS's Professional Learning Programme (PLP) on Teaching Reading and Viewing which was conducted at our school. In addition, our team leader participated in the PLP on Teaching Extensive Reading which was conducted at ELIS. Together, we inquired into our own teaching of reading and viewing practices and the impact of our EL department's reading programme on our students. From our observations and interactions with our students, we noticed that they continued to face difficulties with processing texts despite being taught various learner strategies for reading. They were also not spontaneous readers and had to be persuaded to read. We discussed the role of extensive reading and its attendant benefits such as developing students' schema, vocabulary and reading fluency.

From February to November 2018, our four-member Professional Learning Team (PLT) collaborated with Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray, Master Teacher/EL on developing our students' interest in reading through an Extensive Reading Programme (ERP). We had compelling reasons to explore this area, as we were keen to develop our students as readers and reap its benefits in terms of language

learning. As a department, we had introduced the use of various learner strategies to our students but there was limited impact on students' text comprehension. We had learned from the PLP on Teaching Reading and Viewing that besides adopting a more deliberate approach to teaching students learner strategies and supporting them in reading comprehension, students need to have adequate schema and vocabulary to comprehend texts successfully (Wexler, 2018). Extensive reading facilitates the broadening and deepening of students' schema and vocabulary.

In a survey conducted by the team, we discovered that 80% of our Secondary 1 to 3 students had low reading motivation as they were not reading regularly and held negative attitudes towards reading. For example, they could not sit quietly to read and found reading boring. Hence, we wanted to explore how we could motivate our students to read extensively for pleasure. We strongly believed that we had to begin with the first stage of putting in place an effective ERP so that we could get our students excited about reading and grow them into spontaneous readers. Only then could we consider reaping its benefits such as the development of background knowledge and vocabulary to help students better interact with texts, thus facilitating their reading comprehension. We therefore embarked on the first phase of getting students motivated to read extensively, which became the focus of our inquiry.

Focus of the Inquiry

Research Question

To what extent does an ERP motivate Secondary 1 to 3 students to read widely and extensively?

How We Proceeded with the Inquiry

Our team decided to inquire into how we could motivate our students to read widely and extensively through an ERP. We were guided by the theories and principles of extensive reading to encourage the reading habit among students. We engaged in many professional conversations with Jeya during our PLT meetings beginning from February 2018. We reflected on our beliefs about reading and considered our learners' profiles. Given that our students did not read spontaneously or enjoy reading as much, we reviewed our ERP and explored how we could engage our students in more deliberate ways to read for pleasure.

We referred to the relevant Reading and Viewing Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Skills, Learner Strategies, Attitudes and Behaviour (SSAB) in EL Syllabus 2010. We were guided by the LOs and SSAB listed in Table 1 and designed an ERP to provide a variety of reading materials and experiences for our students. Although our focus was on extensive reading (LO 5b), we also included intensive reading (LOs 2, 3 and 4) as these LOs and SSAB, while different, serve complementary purposes in enhancing students' literacy development. Students applied close and critical reading skills, especially when engaged in post-reading experiences.

Table 1: Reading and Viewing LOs and SSAB

LO	SSAB
LO 2: Close Reading and Viewing Process and comprehend age-/year level-appropriate texts at literal and inferential levels	• Use prior knowledge • Make inferences to draw conclusions • Summarise ideas
LO 3: Critical Reading and Viewing and Appreciation Apply critical reading and viewing by focusing on implied meaning, higher-order thinking, judgement and evaluation	• Read or view a text closely and offer interpretations of it • Recognise writers' intentions (e.g., through their use of words, literary language)
LO 4: Reading and Viewing Literary and Informational/Functional Texts Apply close and critical reading and viewing to a variety of literary selections and informational/functional texts from print and non-print sources	• Identify similar themes in stories and apply this knowledge to interpret the texts • Show awareness of how the writer's use of language varies according to the purpose and audience for the writing to achieve impact
LO 5b: Extensive Reading and Viewing Sustain reading and viewing widely for pleasure, personal development and learning in the literary/content areas	• Read and view, demonstrating the ability to discriminate among a variety of reading-age-appropriate and more thought-provoking books and texts of different genres, from print and non-print sources, as an integral part of daily life • Present a critical response

Literature Review

From our reading, we learned that extensive reading is defined as reading highly comprehensible and interesting target language materials, which allows language learners to be immersed in comprehensible input. Learners in the process of reading these rich resources acquire literacy-related aspects of language (Krashen, 2018). Thus, reading extensively provides students with opportunities for linguistic and cognitive growth, and a positive motivation to read further.

According to Renandya (2007), students' ability to read fluently is best achieved through reading extensively in the language. Learners read a large number of books including series books (Renandya, Krashen & Jacobs, 2018) and other materials in an environment that nurtures a lifelong reading habit. In addition, through reading regularly and in quantity, students learn to read better and enjoy reading more. Students' vocabulary grows as a result of reading extensively and a vast vocabulary enhances their reading comprehension (Renandya, 2007; Myracle, Kingsley & McClellan, 2019).

Day and Bamford (2002) identified 10 core principles for teaching extensive reading that guide the implementation of a school-wide ERP. These principles point to the importance of providing students with a variety of reading materials to read widely, giving time for silent reading and having teachers as role models.

To encourage learners to read and reap the benefits of reading extensively, time and space have to be created for them to do so. Through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or individualised extensive reading, time is set aside for classes or the entire school to read quietly together. Learners are also encouraged to continue reading outside the time allotted. During SSR, significant adults model the habits, choices, comments and attitudes that good readers develop over time (Gardiner, 2005). SSR helps students become better readers as it promotes the reading habit and reading for enjoyment.

While students read alone, opportunities have to be created for them to talk together with others about what they read as it enables them to develop new and deep insights about what they read (Lehman & Scharer, 1996; Renandya, 2007). Students develop a critical and analytical stance as they express their thoughts, explore new possibilities and challenge opinions.

Process and Experience

During our PLT meetings, we discussed our plans for the design of the ERP that was scheduled to be implemented in March 2018. The team planned the ERP for the Secondary 1 to 3 students, informed by the literature that we had read. Our Secondary 4 students did not participate in the study because of constraints such as a packed curriculum that focused largely on preparing them for their upcoming national examinations. Nevertheless, we customised the ERP to meet their needs so that they too would benefit from reading extensively.

The design of the ERP for the Secondary 1 to 3 students took into account aspects of a successful ER approach (Day & Bamford, 2002; Renandya & Jacobs 2002; Renandya, 2007). We focused on the following considerations, as we believed that they were critical in addressing the readiness levels, interests and learning profiles of our students.

Our Considerations when Designing the ERP

a) Choice of Books
We learned from the literature we reviewed that selecting suitable reading materials has a significant influence on students' motivation to read, reading confidence and ability. Our PLT had gathered input from both students and teachers on the types of books to select so that the choices offered were tailored to meet our students' needs. We wanted to focus on print texts initially instead of non-print ones as we wanted our students to have something tangible for their SSR period, known as Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.) Time. We compiled a list of books that was suitable for students from the different levels to read during the allocated periods and beyond.

Other types of reading materials were made accessible to our students. Besides the books, we also introduced other reading resources to keep our students interested and motivated to read. On some occasions, our students read complimentary copies of The Straits Times including the IN supplement during D.E.A.R. Time. Students also read materials from the National Library Board (NLB) or those prepared by other departments in the school.

b) Sustained Silent Reading

As reading is usually individual and silent, we created opportunities for students to engage in silent reading through D.E.A.R. Time. We believed that by offering students dedicated time for reading we would be able to influence their reading behaviour. During this 25-minute period at the start of the school day, students read their chosen novels. To emphasise the value of reading, our staff modelled the habit of reading by engaging in sustained reading. One or two teachers would walk around the school hall to monitor the students reading and ensure that they had reading materials with them. On a few occasions when students did not have their novels with them, supplementary reading resources were provided to ensure that these students had something to read so that the use of the SSR period could be optimised.

Besides SSR in school, students were encouraged to read their novels whenever they had pockets of time to spare. There was also dedicated time within EL lessons to allow students to continue reading. If students were fast readers, they were encouraged to borrow books from the school or public library.

c) Post-Reading Activities

We created fortnightly book discussion periods within our EL instructional programme for post-reading activities. We explored ways to design activities that would enhance students' thinking and enjoyment of the books read and also promote further reading. To support students' understanding and enjoyment of the novels, we adopted a two-pronged approach to provide rich post-reading experiences, within and outside the classroom. The EL level coordinators worked with the level teachers to design post-reading activities (see Table 2) that would best meet their students' needs. These post-reading experiences encouraged students to offer a personal response by reflecting on and questioning what they read. We were mindful that these learning activities were cognitively and affectively engaging for our students and would not contribute to 'readicide' (Gallagher, 2009), a systematic killing of the love of reading.

Table 2: Post-Reading Activities

In-Class Activities	Out-of-Class Activities
Reading Circles Students engage in a structured discussion, playing different roles that give them a purpose for reading. They discuss various issues that surface in the text read. **Character in the Spotlight** Students explore the traits of characters in the books through various activities. For example, they create an Instagram profile of a character in the book to exemplify his/her character traits. 	<u>**School-based**</u> **Brooksian Book Buzz** Teachers and selected students talk about their favourite books during assembly. **Brooksian News Champion** Students present their views on current affairs during assembly. At the end of the presentation, students participate in quizzes. **Brooksian Character Day** Students and staff dress as characters from movies they watch or books they read. **Print-to-Screen Movie Day** Students watch movies based on the novels that they read.
Reading Project In groups, students engage in extended tasks related to the books read. For example: Readers' Theatre: Students write a script based on a scene from the book read and perform it. Video log: Students provide a video of themselves giving a book talk on the book read. PowToon presentation: Students identify a scene from the book and represent it using PowToon, a web-based animation software.	<u>**External Partners**</u> **National Library Board's Books-2-Go** The NLB offers a bulk loan of books that students can borrow from. **National Reading Movement's Read for Books Charity Drive** This event requires that a minimum of 10 readers read for 15 minutes. As a token for the effort, a book is donated by a sponsoring organisation to needy children. Northbrooks Secondary students and staff "raised" 86 books for their reading efforts in 2018. **Book Talk and Meet-the-Author Session** Local authors are invited for a book talk and meet-the-author session. The event promotes reading and enables students to gain deeper understanding of the writing process.

Monitoring of the ERP

To ensure that the ERP was implemented successfully, we considered ways to effectively monitor the programme without it being onerous for both students and teachers. We monitored our students' reading habits and interests, and engagement with post-reading experiences to ensure that the ERP met our students' needs. We also wanted to determine if there was a need to fine-tune the processes. We used the following sources of evidence, which were quantitative and qualitative in nature, to monitor our ERP:

a) Students' Work

At our level meetings, we brought samples of our students' work from post-reading activities to discuss evidence of their reading and learning. We used these opportunities to streamline some of the activities planned and considered those that students preferred such as watching movies to tie in with the books read.

b) Reading Survey

Our team conducted surveys to gather feedback on the ERP and further information on students as readers, and their habits and preferences. These surveys were conducted at the middle and end of the implementation of the ERP.

c) Focus Group Discussion

To gather more detailed information about students' feelings, perceptions and opinions about the ERP, we randomly selected a group of Secondary 1 to 3 students to participate in a focus group discussion held at the end of the year.

d) Reflections

Students reflected on their reading experiences and these reflections gave us insights into how they felt about reading some of the chosen titles or the activities they participated in. These insights helped us to determine what worked well and what needed to be improved.

e) Department / Level / PLT Meetings

We held regular meetings with the Secondary 1 to 3 teachers to gather feedback on their observations of the ERP. These meetings helped to surface specific concerns and needs of students in terms of the books selected and post-reading activities. The PLT members collated the feedback and discussed ways to enhance processes so as to ensure that student learning outcomes were met.

Findings and Discussion

We analysed the different data sources to study the impact of the ERP on our students' motivation to read in relation to a) reading interests and preferences, and b) engagement with silent reading and post-reading experiences.

In this section, we discuss the analysis of the data and identify the key learning points from our inquiry.

1) Design of the ERP

The 10 core principles for teaching extensive reading guided us in the design of the ERP (Day & Bamford, 2002). These principles also guided us in examining our own beliefs about extensive reading. The principled approach that we had adopted supported our students in growing their interest in reading extensively and displaying appropriate reading behaviours. The analysis of the data shows how the following key components in the design of the ERP influenced students' attitudes and behaviours about reading.
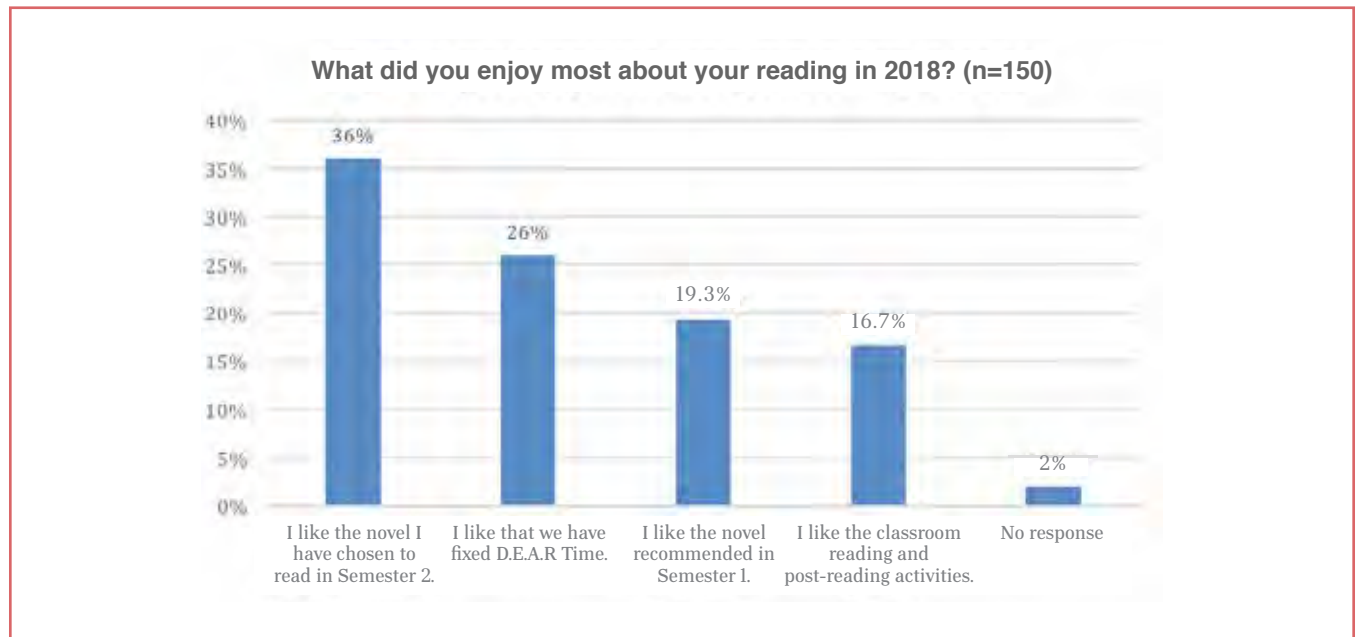
(i) Choice of Reading Materials

In designing our ERP, we were mindful of our students' reading interests, their profiles as readers and also reading readiness levels. While some novels that were recommended to our students might be deemed suitable for lower levels, we assessed them to be at a suitable readability level for our students. We felt that it was important to do so to help pique and sustain our students' interest in reading. In so doing, we ensured that our students did not feel frustrated when they were unable to access more complex materials. We were guided by one of the principles of teaching extensive reading that requires reading material to be accessible to students (Day & Bamford, 2002; Renandya & Jacobs 2002; Renandya, 2007) when giving reading choices to our students.

A few of the book titles recommended were also series books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Percy Jackson*. We believe that such books would encourage our students to read other books in the series, thus further developing their competencies as readers (Renandya et al., 2018). These students would gradually widen their reading selections and read books on different topics by different authors.

Students were given more choices in the selection of books in Semester 2 as compared to Semester 1. We discovered that by offering them more autonomy, their enjoyment of reading increased. When asked to identify what they liked most about the reading programme during the year, the majority had indicated that they enjoyed the novels they had chosen in Semester Two (see Table 3). This sentiment was echoed by a Secondary 2 student in the Normal (Technical) course who said, "Reading a book that is not of your taste is hard to enjoy. However, with choices, I'm able to enjoy the book." One Secondary 3 Express student remarked, "I like the novel, *The Hunger Games*. I find it interesting and exciting." Another student added, "I watched the movie before. There are many details in the book that the movie didn't show."
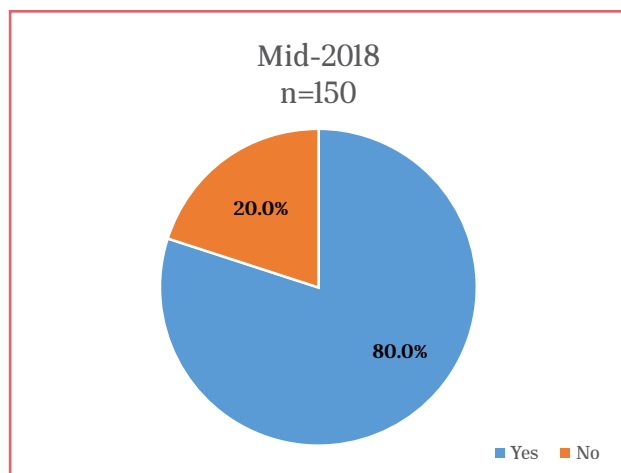
Table 3

What did you enjoy most about your reading in 2018? (n=150)

- I like the novel I have chosen to read in Semester 2. — 36%
- I like that we have fixed D.E.A.R Time. — 26%
- I like the novel recommended in Semester 1. — 19.3%
- I like the classroom reading and post-reading activities. — 16.7%
- No response — 2%

(ii) Dedicated Reading Time in the Instructional Programme

Prior to the implementation of the sustained reading sessions, students did not have dedicated time to engage in reading. However, students grew positively disposed towards the time created for them to read silently. In surveys (see Tables 4a & 4b) conducted at two different time periods, students said that they found D.E.A.R. Time beneficial because it had given them more time to read for pleasure. In addition, they mentioned that sustained reading had helped them to improve their knowledge of grammar and extended their vocabulary.

Have you found D.E.A.R Time beneficial?

Table 4a

Mid-2018
n=150

- Yes — 80.0%
- No — 20.0%

Table 4b

End-2018
n=150

- Yes — 75.4%
- No — 24.6%
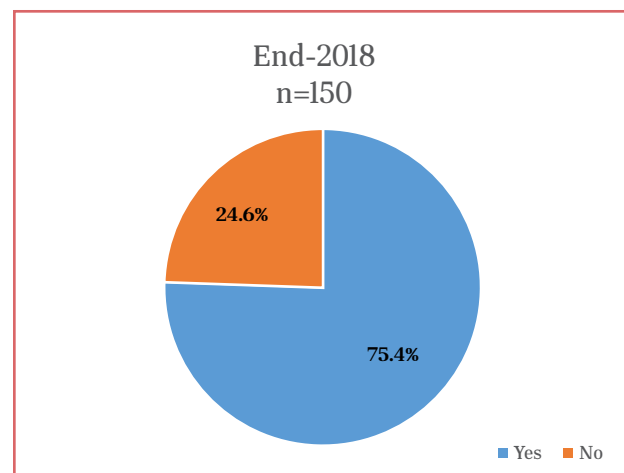
Students said they found more time to read in their daily lives, and this also led to a positive attitudinal change towards reading. One Secondary 3 Express student said, "I don't usually have time to read as I have schoolwork and outings to cope with, so D.E.A.R. Time has given me time to read." Thus, the structured time created for reading enabled students to engage in consistent, independent reading that enhanced their reading enjoyment and attitudes.

(iii) Post-Reading Activities to Develop Engagement, Accountability and Personal Response to Reading

We created opportunities for students to respond to what they read and talk together with peers and teachers about it. While these interactions enabled us to monitor students' reading, we observed that they also presented students with opportunities to engage in productive talk, exploring perspectives, possibilities and challenging opinions. Some students felt that they had gained better understanding of the books read. The teachers reported that many of their students were willing to contribute ideas to the discussion and offered personal responses to what they read. They also observed that the students took accountability for the time they spent on independent silent reading.

The varied class and school-based activities that we had organised made reading come alive for the students. For example, the book talks by the authors enabled students to understand how writers gather inspiration for their ideas and subsequently turn those ideas into books. We simulated the experience of watching movies at cinemas during Print to Screen Movie Day by renting a popcorn machine so that our students could enjoy a snack while watching movies. Some students felt that the "classroom reading activities" made them "more interested in the books". Others enjoyed "the book sharing by teachers".

We constantly reviewed the purposes and expectations of the post-reading activities. We were mindful that they did not become onerous and unintentionally turned students off from reading.

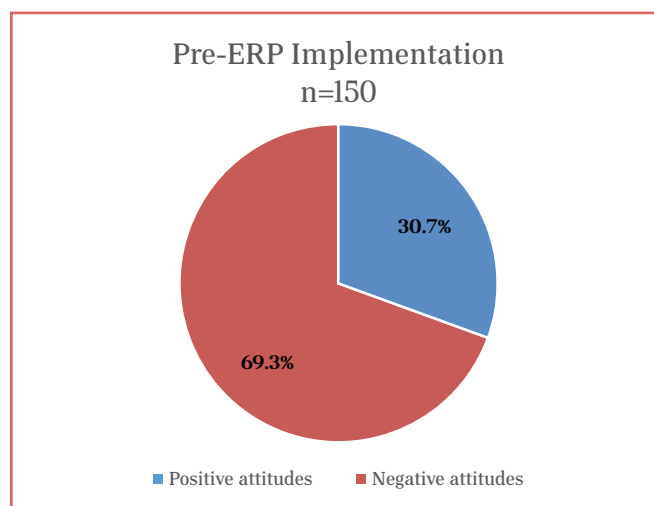### 2) Shift in Students' Reading Attitudes

The design of our ERP including the post-reading experiences enabled us to bring about a shift in our students' reading attitudes. The majority of the students surveyed had expressed negative opinions towards

reading before the implementation of the ERP (see Table 5a). These negative opinions ranged from "boring" to "I hate reading". However, after the implementation of the ERP, there was a significant change in their attitudes towards reading (see Table 5b), with the majority of the students expressing positive opinions towards reading.
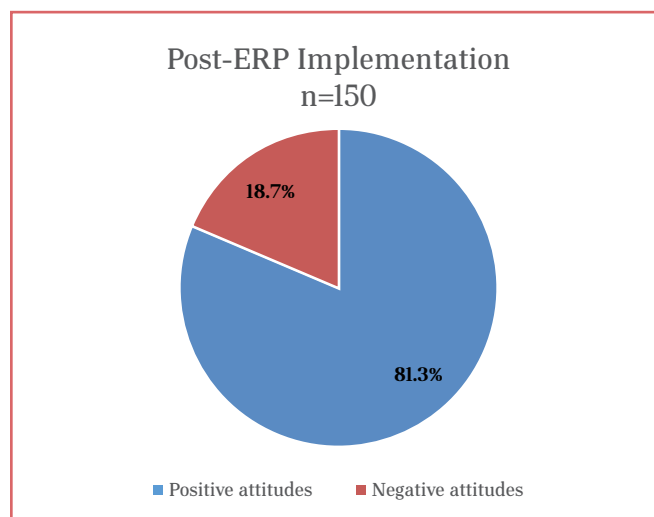
Here are some of the students' responses:
- "Reading has become one of my hobbies."
- "I have learned to appreciate reading."
- "It has helped to motivate me to read more outside of D.E.A.R. Time."
- "The reading programme has made me love to read books more as I get to improve my vocabulary."
- "It also gives me a lot of ideas for writing."
- "I think that spending time reading outside of D.E.A.R. Time is a good habit instead of always using social media."

Table 5a

Pre-ERP Implementation
n=150

30.7%

69.3%

■ Positive attitudes ■ Negative attitudes

Table 5b

Post-ERP Implementation
n=150

18.7%

81.3%

■ Positive attitudes ■ Negative attitudes

3) Supportive School Management and Staff

To create a school-wide culture of reading, it is important to promote reading as a way of life in the school. Our school management and staff supported the EL Department's efforts to promote reading by modelling the reading habit during D.E.A.R. Time. Students saw the principal and teachers of all subjects as readers because they role-modelled the love of reading. Hence, the students were motivated to read for pleasure.

Students' Reflections

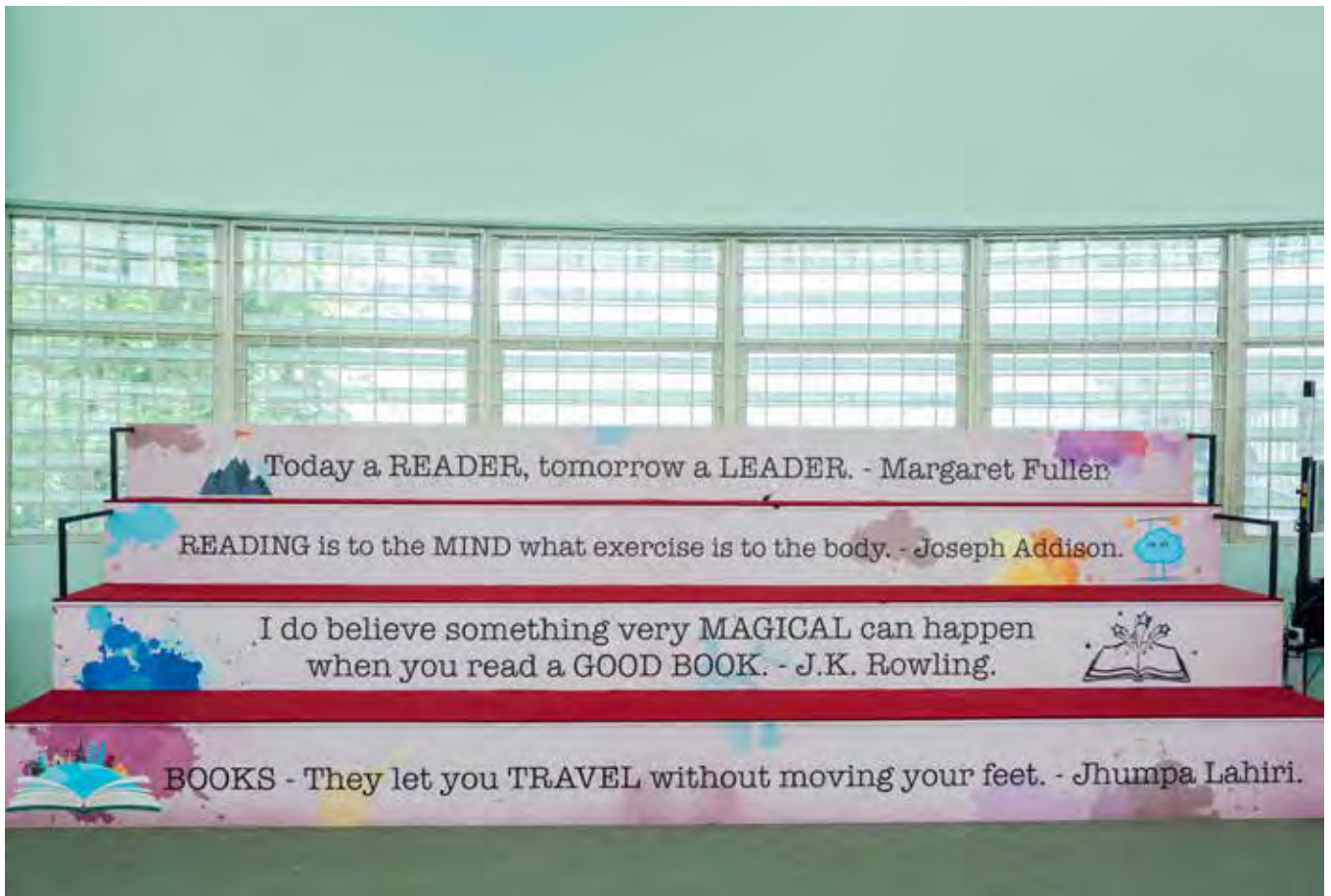|		
Sec 1E student: *"I thought (reading) was time consuming. Now I think it is very important."*	**Sec 2E student:** *"The reading activities and project were fun to do. We did a PowerPoint presentation on some of the main characters in the book. That helped us understand the book better as we had to do a lot of research on the characters."*	**Sec 3E student:** *"It has inspired me to write essays and short stories in my own time."*
Sec 1NA student: *"Because of the reading programme, my desire to read and gain more knowledge has increased. I enjoy reading more now."*	**Sec 2NA student:** *"Reading used to be boring, Now, not so bad."*	**Sec 3NA student:** *"I have started liking reading more."*
Sec 1NT student: *"I am more interested in reading now."*	**Sec 2NT student:** *"Reading was boring but now I find it a bit fun. I get to absorb big words from the book."*	**Sec 3NT student:** *"I am starting a new habit at home by slowly picking up reading and I finally am interested in reading."*

Today a READER, tomorrow a LEADER. - Margaret Fuller

READING is to the MIND what exercise is to the body. - Joseph Addison.

I do believe something very MAGICAL can happen when you read a GOOD BOOK. - J.K. Rowling.

BOOKS - They let you TRAVEL without moving your feet. - Jhumpa Lahiri.

Our Reflections

Carolyn:
Being a member of the Reading Programme PLT and crafting the ERP were part of an exciting journey for me. I feel that it is important to know your students well and know what may or may not work for them. From there, the selection of reading materials and customisation of the post-reading experiences can be done to ensure that students feel their needs are met and their journey as readers is well-supported.

Cinda:
It was heartening to see my students engaged in reading during D.E.A.R. Time. In Semester 2, I could see that the students were more enthusiastic about reading a book that they had chosen. The Print-To-Screen movie screenings had also generated more interest in the books these movies were based on.

Sangeeta:
This has been an enriching experience for me as I learned how to plan and implement a reading programme with my teammates. The discussions we had were very insightful as we sat together to review the various initiatives and give our feedback. I have certainly gained much from learning alongside my team members and am grateful for the guidance given by Jeya.

Jasvindar:
After a mere four D.E.A.R. Time sessions, our students' interest in reading was kindled. This was amazing! It became a common sight to see students reading spontaneously in school, and not just during D.E.A.R. Time. To recognise our efforts in developing a reading culture, the EL Department was presented with the MOE Outstanding Contribution Award!

Conclusion

It was certainly heartening to see our students being able to sit quietly and read for pleasure, not just during D.E.A.R. Time but also during the change of periods, and after curriculum time.

We began by guiding students in their choice of books. For many, this initiated them into reading, which they would not have embarked on themselves. Based on the evidence we gathered, the ERP has helped students to improve their attitudes towards reading. Most students enjoyed the increased autonomy in selecting their reading materials. Their interest in reading was further sustained by the learning experiences during the post-reading phase.

The ERP has provided a good start towards developing a reading culture in the school. We will continue to review and refine our ERP and sustain the reading habit among our students. We also intend to study the extent of its impact on the development of students' literacy as part of another phase of this inquiry.

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Mind the Reading Gap

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In collaboration with Shakila Vasu, Master Teacher/EL, Shanti Marion Prakash, Lead Teacher/EL, Tan Gek Hong Angela, Senior Teacher/EL and Mok Song Imm, Senior Teacher/EL inquired into closing the reading gap caused by students' lack of interest in reading. The inquiry explored a plan for an Extensive Reading Programme in three schools. The Extensive Reading Programme that was co-designed was based on three of Pilgreen's (2000) eight components of successful reading programmes, namely Appeal, Encouragement and Follow-Up Activities. The co-inquirers observed that students' interest in reading heightened and they acquired new vocabulary, which enabled them to bridge their reading gaps.

Introduction

The three of us participated in the Teacher Leaders Programme (TLP)2 in 2018. The TLP2 required us to do a capstone project, which involved the application of our learning in school and classroom contexts. In discussing the content for the capstone project, we realised that all three of us faced a similar challenge in our schools – our students' lack of interest in reading. As we were attached to the English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS) during the TLP2, we participated in ELIS's Professional Learning Programme on extensive reading conducted by Shakila Vasu, Master Teacher/ EL. As we shared a common vision of building a vibrant reading culture amongst our students, we decided to design and implement an Extensive Reading Programme (ERP) in Yio Chu Kang Secondary School (YCKSS), Tao Nan School (TNS) and Xingnan Primary School (XNPS), in collaboration with Shakila as our advisor and mentor. Angela aimed to build a reading culture and habit amongst her students in YCKSS. In TNS, Shanti wanted to develop her students' non-fiction background knowledge, which would also require interest in reading widely. In XNPS, Song Imm was focused on enriching and extending her students' learning and knowledge that would promote their reading interest. We, therefore, wished to set up an ERP for our own schools that would cultivate in our students a desire to read, and to read extensively.

Learning from the Review of Literature

In our review of the relevant literature on ERP, we learned that children who read extensively improve in their reading comprehension and vocabulary (Krashen, 2004). Kerns and Bryan (2018) estimated that children learn one new word for every 1,000 words read. They stated that between kindergarten and twelfth grade, there is a vocabulary gap of 12,200 words between students with a daily reading time of at least 30 minutes and students who read less than 15 minutes per day. Thus, we felt that it was crucial for us to motivate our students to cultivate the habit of reading extensively so as to enhance their vocabulary and close the reading gap. In our reading of Renandya & Jacobs (2002), we learned about the characteristics of a successful ERP, which include encouraging learners to read self-selected and large amounts of varied reading materials within their reading levels, and to participate in post-reading activities. In an ERP, the teacher performs multiple roles of a reading motivator, a role model reader, a reading monitor and a reading administrator. The most important of these roles is that of being a role model, who demonstrates enthusiasm for reading, in order to motivate and encourage the reluctant reader. As pointed out by Siah and Kwok (2010), students need to value reading, and believe that reading is important and will benefit them. Once they buy into this, their attitudes and behaviours towards reading will improve.

We also reviewed Pilgreen's (2000) factors for a successful Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) Programme, which was introduced to us by Dr Christina Ratnam during TLP2. Pilgreen (2000) identified eight components of successful SSR programmes from her close analysis of 32 such programmes. The factors are access, appeal, conducive environment, encouragement, staff training, non-accountability, follow-up activities and distributed time to read. Pilgreen (2000) highlighted that the impact of each factor would depend on the school context. Based on what we gathered from our review of literature, we decided on an ERP that would be characterised by three of Pilgreen's eight success factors – Appeal, Encouragement and Follow-up Activities. Pilgreen (2000) recommended having reading materials that appeal to readers to bring about greater engagement in reading. Engagement in reading is determined by the materials readers use and these materials should be ideally pitched to readers' interests and reading levels. Encouragement as a success factor requires the involvement of teaching and non-teaching staff in the promotion of reading. A reluctant reader may actually be willing to participate in reading activities because a teacher may have stressed the importance of reading for future success. Pilgreen (2000) encouraged natural and non-evaluative activities to follow up on a good read. There should be activities that sustain the excitement gained from the books read. The follow-up activities should help to create an environment where students can engage collaboratively with one another.

Our Inquiry into Closing the Reading Gap

We designed an ERP integrating three of Pilgreen's (2000) success factors – Appeal, Encouragement and Follow-up Activities to motivate our students to read extensively. The ERP was implemented from April to October 2018 for 25 students from a Secondary 1 class in YCKSS, 72 students from two Primary 5 classes in TNS, and 38 students from a Primary 3 class in XNPS. In reviewing reading materials that would appeal to the students and cater to their interests, we decided to use the curated non-fiction and literary articles available on the ReadWorks website. This is because not only were these reading resources easily available to the students across all three schools, these resources were also easily customisable according to the students' reading interest, age and stamina. We especially liked its Read-An-Article-A-Day (RAAD) programme, a 10-minute daily routine in which students read one non-fiction article as part of a weekly related article set in order to increase students' background knowledge, vocabulary and reading stamina. With ReadWorks, students could self-select, and read large amounts of varied reading materials within their reading levels. Informed by the literature that teacher participation would serve as encouragement to reluctant readers, we provided adult modelling to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and the value of reading. We read aloud to our students and shared our insights from the reading, and relating where possible, to our personal experiences. Students participated in follow-up activities such as documenting their thoughts about what they had read in the Book of Knowledge (BOK).

To make reading appealing to the students, YCKSS leveraged existing library programmes. There were book displays in the library and student librarians wrote book reviews to promote the books. Student librarians also made announcements about library activities during morning assembly to encourage their peers to visit the

library. Besides inviting vendors to set up book displays for the students to select books for the library, the library club organised a learning journey to a bookstore for students to select books that they were interested in. To encourage students to read, Angela and her fellow English Language teachers read together with the students during silent reading in the parade square. The students undertook a research project on Greek mythology as a follow-up activity to the assigned reader, *Percy Jackson* and *The Lightning Thief* during the school vacation in June. Feedback from the students on the follow-up activity of the research project on Greek Mythology was encouraging. Students' feedback revealed that the online reading that they were assigned enabled them to learn new vocabulary. A few were encouraged to read the prescribed reader again to refresh their memory. Angela found that providing relevant follow-up activities was indeed useful in motivating her students to read.

At TNS, to make reading appealing and to encourage all students to visit the library, a book launch, co-ordinated by the library coordinator and the school librarian, was organised. Publicity was drummed up for the book launch, and brand new books that were available for borrowing were highlighted. Shanti observed that the teachers' purposeful and planned attempts at encouraging the students to visit the library resulted in much excitement and anticipation among the students who could not wait to run to the library on the day of the book launch. RAAD was introduced to two Primary 5 classes as a follow-up activity to increase their non-fiction background knowledge. Using a class poll, Shanti assigned non-fiction texts from the ReadWorks website based on student preferences. At home, students had to log into their ReadWorks accounts and read the assigned articles. After reading each article, students wrote about two

or three things they had learned and would like to remember in their BOK, using the teacher-provided sentence starters. In addition, Shanti also directed the students to find sentences in the text that expressed important ideas, write the key words and look up the meaning if necessary. The students then shared their new knowledge with their classmates. Shanti found that by using the BOK, the students could hold on to it and refer to it whenever they wanted to. It also enabled them to see, document and own the knowledge that they were acquiring over the weeks.

In XNPS, RAAD was introduced to the students as a follow-up activity. For example, based on the Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading (STELLAR) Programme unit, Houses in Singapore, students read about houses around the world. RAAD proved to be meaningful as the articles were linked to themes in the STELLAR Programme units. It provided extended learning beyond reading STELLAR texts. To create the environment that Pilgreen (2000) advocates in which students could engage collaboratively with one another, the students were provided the opportunity to "Share a Book a Day". The students took turns to talk about the books that they had read. They expressed their views on what the books were about, and described the characters and their favourite parts of the books. Students borrowed or bought similar books to read after listening to their classmates talk about the books. Song Imm observed that students asked interesting questions about the books. Students' feedback showed that RAAD and "Share a Book a Day" were two activities that contributed to them reading more and enjoying what they read.

Our Reflections

Angela:
This inquiry made me realise that reading is a habit that can be cultivated. Besides teaching reading skills, we also need to cultivate in our students the reading habit. For disengaged readers, it is necessary to address their attitudes and beliefs. Once students' beliefs shift and they enjoy reading, they will recognise the benefits of reading.

Shanti:
My inquiry journey started with a tornado, or more specifically, a text about tornados. It became clear to me how vital it was for my students to build their non-fiction background knowledge. The background knowledge we bring to our reading colours every aspect of our learning and understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). If readers have nothing to connect new information to, it is difficult to construct meaning. When we have the background knowledge for a topic, we are more likely to understand the text. My inquiry revealed to me that my reluctant readers in my low readiness class did not always appreciate the ERP activities organised for them. However, it was evident to me that they became more aware of how the ERP had enhanced their background knowledge of various topics. It also confirmed for me that my students in my high readiness class, who already enjoyed reading to begin with, thoroughly appreciated the planned and purposeful follow-up activities.

Song Imm:
I appreciated the learning from reading Pilgreen (2000), who identified eight components of successful reading programmes from her close analysis of 32 reading programmes. It was good that I read story books related to themes in STELLAR Programme's materials, whilst getting my students to talk about the books they read. My students' reading was further extended through reading materials from ReadWorks. They enjoyed these reading activities and were engaged.

Conclusion

Through this inquiry, we were encouraged that we were able to stimulate our students' interest to read extensively. This was due to the post-reading activities that motivated them to read beyond the usual fare, for example, the non-fiction texts in TNS and XNPS, and online research in YCKSS. To some extent, through extensive reading, the students were able to bridge their reading gaps when they acquired new vocabulary. However, the reluctant readers remained unmotivated to read. Every educator knows the importance of extensive reading and its effect on language development. Our future inquiry on extensive reading will focus on the reluctant readers who have little or no interest in reading for pleasure. We are interested to know why the reluctant readers are still unmotivated despite the current efforts that our teams in our respective schools have put in to engage them in reading, and what can further motivate them to read.

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High Progress Learners in the English Language Classroom

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This classroom inquiry was conducted to explore how we could engage high progress students more effectively. Ms Evelyn Yeo, Lead Teacher from Innova Primary School collaborated with Mrs Prisca Lee, Master Teacher/EL and Mr Chue Kah Loong, Lecturer at the National Institute of Education to investigate the impact of the remodelled school-based English Language (EL) programme on a Primary 4 class of 38 high progress students. The remodelling of the school-based EL programme was based on the Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM). The PCM looks at how a curriculum could be approached according to four parallels (Core, Connections, Practice and Identity) with the aim of helping students see the bigger picture of what they are learning, and enhance their understanding of the subject matter. A quantitative survey was designed to assess students' enjoyment, interest, critical thinking, boredom and anxiety relating to the remodelled school-based EL programme. The findings showed that students' enjoyment, interest and critical thinking increased, and their boredom reduced, but their anxiety remained unchanged after three academic terms of intervention.

The Context of My Inquiry

I have been teaching high progress students for eight years. I am concerned about how I could make learning more enjoyable for my students, develop their critical thinking skills and design lessons that are more interesting. In 2018, I taught a Primary 4 class of 38 high progress students. They read, wrote and spoke at more advanced levels than their peers, and brought with them rich prior knowledge to the class. However, my students were disengaged when they were asked to complete tasks, which did not pose new learning to them, or if the lessons did not challenge them sufficiently. I asked myself if I could make my teaching more relevant and interesting so that my students would better enjoy their learning of English Language. I wanted to provide opportunities for my students to learn topics in greater depth and breadth. This led me to collaborate with my mentor, Mrs Prisca Lee, Master Teacher/EL. We conducted this classroom inquiry when I participated in the ELIS LT-ST Mentoring Programme. Prisca introduced a knowledgeable other, Mr Chue Kah Loong, Lecturer at the National Institute of Education (NIE), to support us in the analysis of data.

Learning from the Review of Literature

I set out to deepen my knowledge about high progress learners and to be familiar with the learning theories relevant for this group of learners. I also reflected on my school-based EL programme and sought to find out how redesigning the units of work could meet the needs of my students in terms of increasing their enjoyment, interest and critical thinking, as well as reducing their boredom and anxiety. High progress learners are capable of learning and retaining information quickly. They are curious and bring with them a large knowledge base to the classroom (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011). These characteristics of high progress learners are prevalent and evident in my interaction with and observation of my students.

I began my inquiry with a search for a suitable approach to remodel the school-based EL programme for my students. I found the Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM) (Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien & Burns, 2002) suitable for the remodelling of the school-based EL programme. It was appropriate for two main reasons. First, I could leverage the existing school-based EL programme and not start from scratch when redesigning a programme for my students. Second, the four parallels of the PCM could be used in a variety of ways to extend the learning opportunities for students beyond what was presented in the school-based EL programme. The four parallels of the PCM comprise the core curriculum, curriculum of connections, curriculum of practice and curriculum of identity. The core curriculum frames the knowledge, skills and understanding for a unit of work. The curriculum of connections leads the learners to encounter and interact with the key concepts, principles and skills in a variety of settings. The curriculum of practice helps students function with increasing skills and confidence, and promotes students' expertise as practitioners of the discipline. The curriculum of identity uses the curriculum as a catalyst for self-actualisation. A unit of work, which is organised with the parallels in mind, could enable students to see the bigger picture of what they are learning.

Next, I considered how I could streamline the current school-based EL programme. According to Reis, Burns and Renzulli (1992), curriculum compacting, an instructional technique, could be used to streamline the programme, especially what high progress learners have already mastered. The process involves defining the goals and outcomes of a particular unit of work, determining, and documenting what students have already mastered based on a specified set of learning objectives. It also involves providing replacement strategies for material already mastered with instructional options that enable more productive use of students' time, so that students' learning can be enriched or accelerated. In short, I learned from my review of the relevant literature that curriculum compacting and the use of the PCM could enhance learners' engagement and reduce boredom.
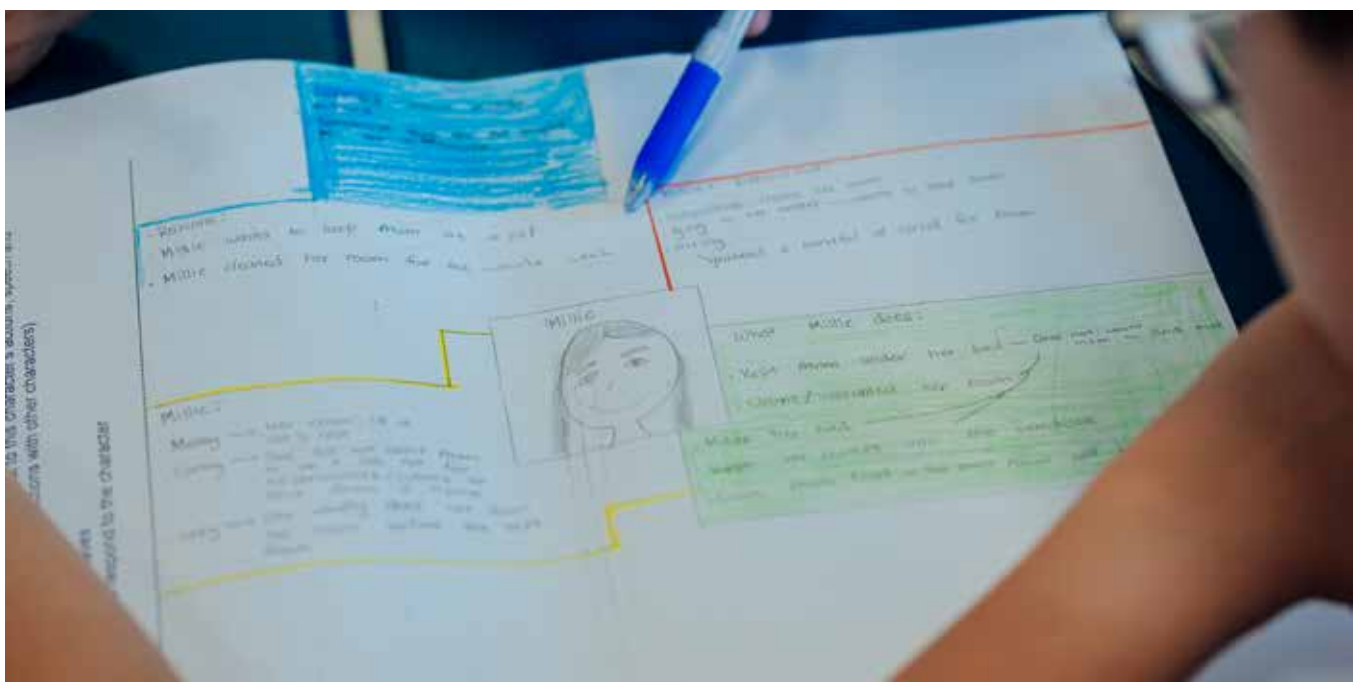
The Inquiry Process

I decided on remodelling the school-based EL programme by compacting the units of work (Reis et al., 1992), and using the parallels of the PCM (Tomlinson et al., 2002) to redesign the units of work for three academic terms.

Redesigning Units of Work

I referred to the learning outcomes in the EL Syllabus when redesigning the units of work. I considered how the units of work could be compacted to make better use of the time spent in the classroom. I decided to focus on four areas of language learning: grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. Table 1 summarises the compacting of the units of work.

Table 1: Compacting Units of Work

Areas of Language Learning	Before Compacting	After Compacting
Grammar and Vocabulary	Grammar and vocabulary items were taught explicitly and students would complete school-based worksheets.	School-based grammar and vocabulary worksheets were completed as pre-assessment tasks at home. Only grammar or vocabulary items, language structures and skills that students had difficulty with or were newly exposed to, were taught explicitly.
Reading	Students were guided to process and comprehend the text at the literal and inferential levels. In the re-reading of the text, students were guided to process and comprehend the text at the evaluative level.	Students were given the texts to read prior to the start of the unit. Students were guided to have a global understanding of the text, starting with a class discussion on the purpose of the text and what the author does to achieve impact. Students made connections with other texts to deepen their understanding of the organisational structure of texts, language features and contexts. They also reflected on what they read and viewed.
Writing	Students would write a text based on the type of text and theme of the unit. The writing task began with a class discussion of ideas, followed by guided group writing, and the students produced a written text individually.	Students would write a text based on the type of text and theme of the unit. Students assumed the role of a practitioner in the relevant field (e.g., fairy tale authors, information report writers, blog writers) when writing. They critically self- and peer-assessed their work using a class-generated rubric with identified success criteria.

In addition to considering how the units of work could be compacted, I also considered how I could apply the four parallels of the PCM. I thought about what the students had learned in Primary 3 and would bring with them as prior knowledge when constructing the lesson objectives.

I selected a Primary 4 unit based on the book "Prince Zak and the Wise Frog" to begin remodelling my school-based EL programme to better engage my class of Primary 4 students. The theme of the unit selected was fairy tales. I referred to the EL Syllabus and considered the key understandings that I would want my students to grasp at the end of the unit. This is an important consideration as this is in line with the core curriculum parallel of the PCM, which advocates the framing of the knowledge, skills and understanding that students need to acquire (Tomlinson et al., 2002).

Besides teaching the organisational structure and language features of a fairy tale explicitly, students explored how fairy tales reflect cultural and social mores of the times they were written in (Wong, 2003). I helped them make connections between fairy tales set in different times. The text for the unit was Prince Zak and the Wise Frog, which is a modern twisted fairy tale in which the protagonist is a prince rather than a princess. My students compared this text with the traditional fairy tale, 'The Frog Prince', in terms of how they are similar or different in organisational structure, language features and contexts to make sense of the connections between the two texts. Helping students make connections and interact with key ideas is what the curriculum of connections in the PCM advocates (Tomlinson et al., 2002). This enables them to see the broader picture of what they are learning.

After helping my students understand the key features of a fairy tale, I focused on teaching the students the skills required of a fairy tale author. The students learned how to generate, select and organise ideas, develop 'characters', 'plot' and infuse the element of 'magic' and 'values' into their writing. All these aspects are key to writing a fairy tale (Wong, 2003). The students assumed the role of a fairy tale author and wrote a fairy tale individually. As an optional activity, the students looked up successful fairy tale authors to find out what made them successful and the traits they could learn from these authors. Enabling students to apply the skills learned like a practitioner in the field is what the curriculum of practice in the PCM advocates (Tomlinson et al., 2002). The students also reviewed their writing through self- and peer-assessment using a class-generated rubric. They reflected on their own learning and how they could possibly extend their learning beyond what was taught in the unit. To ensure that my students mastered the areas of language learning, I monitored their understanding through my observation of and interaction with them.

Collecting the Evidence

To monitor how the remodelled programme impacted students' enjoyment, interest, critical thinking, boredom and anxiety, evidence was collected from 38 Primary 4 high progress learners. A questionnaire with 24 items was designed. Eleven items measured enjoyment and interest, five items measured critical thinking, four items measured boredom and another four measured anxiety. The students responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (*not at all*) to five (*very much*). The items measuring enjoyment, boredom and anxiety were adapted from the Achievement Emotion Questionnaire, which was used in the study by Lichtenfeld, Pekrun, Stupnisky, Reiss, and Murayama (2012) to assess elementary students' achievement emotions relating to enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom pertaining to three types of academic settings (i.e., attending class, doing homework, and taking tests and examinations). The items measuring interest were adapted from the Children Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) (SDT, n.d.). The IMI is a multi-dimensional measurement device measuring interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, effort, value/usefulness, felt pressure and tension, and perceived choice. The items measuring critical thinking were adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, which is a well-validated self-report instrument of motivation and learning strategies (Pintrich, Smith, García & McKeachie, 1991). The questionnaire was administered in Terms 1, 2 and 3. I also collected feedback from the students on their learning experiences.

Table 2: Sample of Questionnaire Items

I enjoyed English Language class.
English Language class bores me.
English Language class scares me.
I would describe the activities as very interesting.
I often found myself questioning things I heard or read to decide if I found them convincing.

Discussion of Learning and Findings

Students reported that they did not enjoy the lessons in Term 2 as much as they did in Term 1. It could be because I spent more time preparing the students for the Mid-Year Examination instead of implementing the remodelled programme according to the breadth and depth I had intended. Based on Term 2's data, I deliberately included opportunities for project-based assignments, authentic experiences and role-playing in Term 3. The students were also given the autonomy to choose their writing topics in Term 3's remodelled units. Term 3's data showed that students' enjoyment, interest and critical thinking increased, and their boredom reduced, but their anxiety remained unchanged (see Table 3). I attributed the increase in students' motivation in Term 3 to the fact that the students were increasingly used to the rigour of the remodelled programme and hence, felt that they enjoyed learning in the EL classroom. From a teacher's perspective, I also gained the experience of teaching the remodelled programme over time and made use of the data from each term to improve the programme.

Table 3: Term 3's Data
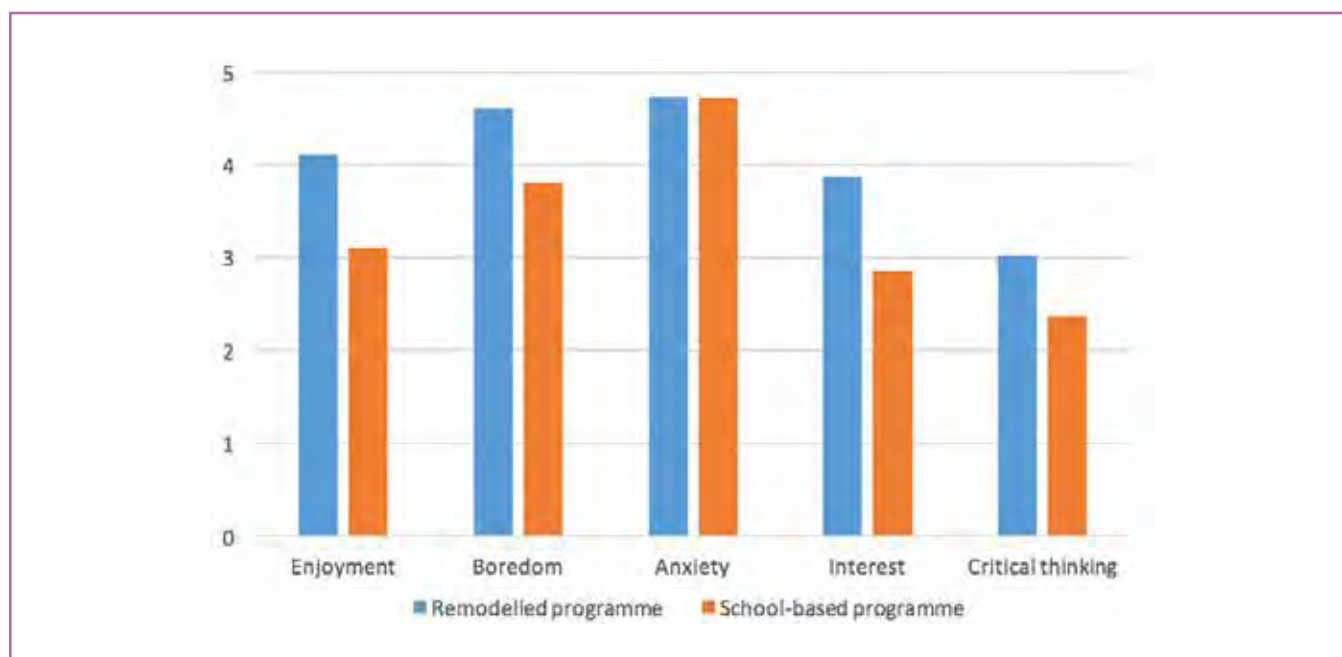
Samples of Students' Feedback on their Learning Experiences

Student A:
"The EL class was fun as we got to experience writing books and learning how to conduct research. Other EL classes were boring because we just did worksheets and stuff."

Student B:
"It was less boring because it was not just about doing Learning Sheets. I learned different ways to write instead of doing what we did in examinations. I can write in different ways."

Student C:
"It was more challenging and fun and it made us think deeper so we will not fall asleep. We did many different things (e.g., writing our own procedural texts, role-playing)."

Student D:
"It is interesting because Mrs Ngiam always makes us do activities which she sometimes goes very deep into them. Like the Rainbow Fish story, at first, it seemed like a simple story. But there were a lot of things that went into the story."

Student E:
"It is a place where options are treasured. In other classes, I'm silent. But in EL class, I feel free."

My Reflections

From my interactions with and observations of my students and from their reflections, these students enjoyed learning most when they were given the choice of working with their peers and were sufficiently challenged. With the increased knowledge about high progress learners and the literature informing me about this area of teaching and learning, I hope to deepen my knowledge of high progress learners to support my future inquiry into this area.

I am thankful and grateful to be part of the ELIS LT-ST Mentoring Programme during which I interacted with Prisca as my mentor and guide. She has given me a lot of support and feedback on my journey in designing engaging lessons for the high progress learners. I am also heartened to have learned research ideas and skills from Kah Loong. He has sharpened my thoughts about how classroom inquiry can be conducted and supported me in data analysis, which is an area of growth for me.

Conclusion

This classroom inquiry provided me with the opportunity to deepen my knowledge about teaching high progress learners. It also provided me with the experience of making informed decisions about remodelling the school-based EL programme based on the research data and evidence that I collected. Although the inquiry conducted was with a small sample size and only within my class, the findings and learning from this experience would guide me in the remodelling of the programme when my students go to Primary 5. I hope to make use of the

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) to guide me in improving the remodelled programme as it advocates autonomy, competence and relatedness. According to SDT, the need for autonomy refers to the learners' need to be in control of their actions when engaging in a learning activity. The need for competence refers to learners' need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. The need for relatedness refers to learners' experiences of positive and mutually satisfying relationships. I believe that the use of the SDT in the remodelling of the programme would enhance my students' intrinsic motivation to learn and enable them to become autonomous and competent learners.

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