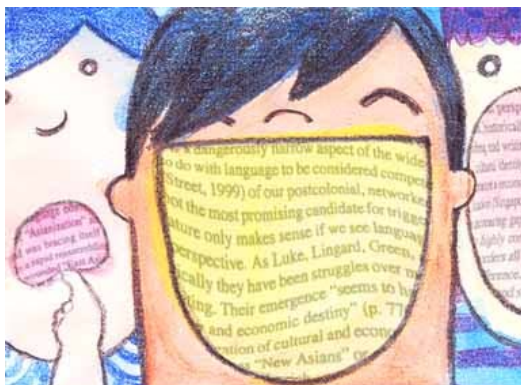


Between the lines

Language may come naturally to children but learning to use it effectively is something that still needs to be taught. This *SingTeach* issue tackles common challenges in language teaching and how teachers and researchers are dealing with it.



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Inspire

Reading Teachers and Teaching Readers

Research says that unless teachers themselves experience the struggle of actively engaging with texts, it would be difficult for them to encourage their students to do likewise. Our researchers put this to the test.

Developing students' critical literacy and reading skills is a key learning outcome in Singapore's secondary English syllabus (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, research findings indicate that the use of texts in classrooms has been largely limited to extracting information, with very little need to interpret or generate new knowledge.

To address this disparity, a research team from the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) began the project, "Building Teachers' Narrative and Textual Capacities", a two-stage intervention into secondary English classrooms in Singapore. Beginning with teachers' own reading practices, the team hopes to influence how literacy is taught and learned in the classroom.

Where's the gap?

This research project was designed to first develop teachers' narratological and textual capacity, that is, their ability to understand and interpret various texts.

According to Dr Jim Albright, the project's principal investigator, "Teachers' narrative competence is a neglected aspect in professional development for improving students' literacy." (Albright, 2006, p. 8)

True enough, researchers found that many of the teachers had been "conditioned" to think that there is a fixed, singular meaning to each text. This mindset is then passed on to their students through a rigid reading pedagogy.

The research team contends that if literacy is basically about "having access to the practices involved in the making and remaking of

textual meaning", then the limited capacity of English teachers to engage in such meaning-making in turn limits students' ability to interpret texts creatively. (Kwek, Albright, & Kramer-Dahl, 2007, p. 76)

At the same time, teachers who believe that textual meanings are determined tend to have repertoires of readings that are narrow and limiting. This can also affect how their students will be able to interact with the different texts they read in the classroom. As Dr Albright puts it:

"Importantly, *students' ability to explore and develop possible narrative connections, understandings and analyses are dependent on teachers' pedagogical practices* that afford students rich opportunities to work with texts." (2006, p. 11, emphasis added)

Building communities

To address the gaps in reading pedagogy, the research team organised reading circles where teachers come together regularly to discuss their responses to the texts they are reading. These texts could be literary, non-fictional or professional texts, and are either selected by the researchers or collectively chosen by the group.

These reading circles are important because though these teachers teach reading, they have little time to read outside their areas of work. Also, some teachers are "poor" readers themselves - that is, they do not think critically about the texts they read nor respond creatively to what they read - criteria that they expect of the students they teach (Kwek et al., 2007).

Unlike book clubs, where discussions are limited to an exchange of personal opinions, the reading circle texts are chosen to encourage critical discussion related to their professional practice. The discussions are scaffolded by the researchers, who seek to link the teachers' own reading experiences and personal experiences with what is mentioned in the texts, and to consider how such texts may be useful for their classes.

Developing professional capacities

The merits of employing teachers' reading circles in their professional development have been documented extensively. Among other things, they facilitate an environment for professional development by opening opportunities for a diversity of personal readings within a safe and intellectually supportive context.

The reading circles provide teachers with a shared meta-language to talk about both the texts and about their pedagogical practices. "Working together the goal is to have teachers see that their engagement with these texts is enriched by sharing multiple and varied interpretations," notes Dr Albright (2006, p. 24).

"It is hoped that participants will come to feel a responsibility to help their colleagues learn through their sharing of their interpretations," he adds. "They may come to recognise that their colleagues are resources for their own learning and reflection, and thus, develop a commitment to their collective growth." (Albright, 2006, p. 24)

It is hoped that this enhanced capacity in turn would help them to design more effective lessons, which is the focus of the second phase of the research. It is also hoped that these teacher communities will later be propagated across other levels and schools.

Encouraging reading

The research team has been actively involved in two "neighbourhood" schools since January 2007. Despite some initial resistance, the reading circles are now into the second year (over 15 sessions). Over 20 teachers from the two schools are participating in the project, all of whom are lower secondary English teachers.

It is encouraging to note that the teachers strongly believe that reading is crucial in improving their students' English language competency. They also recognise that there is a need, in their reading curriculum and in their daily classroom interactions, to connect

more strongly with their students' out-of-school textual experiences and practices.

These realisations form the foundation for the next phase of the research, which is focused on curriculum design and implementation. Here, the objective is to encourage teachers to use the knowledge and skills developed in the first stage of the project to improve their teaching practices. They will also be asked to do their own action research projects to find out more about their students' literacy practices.

For teachers looking for a good read or a good place to start, here are some recommended readings:

Appleman, D. (2000). *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents*. Toronto: University Of Toronto Press.

Commeyras, M., Bisplinghoff, B., & Olson, J. (2003). *Teachers as readers: Perspectives on the importance of reading in teachers' classrooms and lives*. New York: International Reading Association.

Day, J. P., Spiegel, D. L., McLellan, J., & Brown, V. B. (2002). *Moving forward with literature circles: How to plan, manage and evaluate literature circles that deepen understanding and foster a love of reading*. New York: Scholastic.

Tyson, L. (2001). *Learning for a diverse world: Using critical theory to read and write about literature*. London: Routledge.

Wineburg, S., & Grossman, P. (1998, January). Creating a community of learners: Among high school teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 350-353.

- > Read more about this project at www.crpp.nie.edu.sg
- > Read about the other CRPP projects on student reading in **Issue 4** of *SingTeach*.

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Ideas

Figures of Speech

In 2005, CRPP began the first massive study on the language use, proficiency and identity of Singaporean children. Three years down the road, SingTeach catches up with the research team to show you what they've found out.

Learning to speak more than one language is a large part of growing up in Singapore. Yet, little is known about how we decide to choose, use and develop the languages we speak. As the nation's multiracial society continues to grow, there needs to be a clearer picture of exactly how we communicate.

The Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore is an ambitious large-scale project by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) aimed at understanding the language use, ideology, proficiency and identity of 10-year-olds in Singapore. Now in its third year of implementation, the research team shares what they've found out with *SingTeach*.

Pertinent findings

The team's findings indicate that the way young Singaporeans use language is largely dependent on context, with constant code-switching depending on the speaker, the location, and even the type of conversation

going on. Below is a brief look into some of their findings:

Who am I talking to?

- A majority of the children surveyed prefer to use English at home. Seventy-one percent use English, sometimes mixed with their mother tongue (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil), when speaking to their siblings. However, when speaking to their grandparents, 85% of them use the vernacular.

- Chinese children tend to use more English to discuss school work and other matters while Malay children tend to use their mother tongue when they are with friends of the same race. All three groups indicated that they are most comfortable with friends who can speak both English and their mother tongue.

How do I decide?

- The team noticed that the students code-switched often. "This literacy practice is often disallowed in Mother Tongue classes but in reality, people do code-switch when they communicate," says Dr Viniti Vaish, one of the project's principal investigators.

- Children's perceptions of the person they are addressing influences what language they use. For example, in one activity, a child was given \$10 to spend in a mall. Interestingly, she spoke to the shopkeeper in her mother tongue but spoke to the researcher in English because she felt that she needed to use English to speak to an "educated" person.

What do I like to watch?

- Chinese children watch a lot of Chinese programmes and movies whereas the Malay children do not like watching programmes in their mother tongue.

- Some Indian children only watch Tamil movies. Their parents do not allow them to watch English-language "made-in-Hollywood" programmes because they feel that the language used is unsuitable. Despite this, these children speak fluent English.

Am I good at using this language?

- When asked to rate their language abilities, the children rated themselves much higher than what the school rated them.
- The majority of them indicated high levels of proficiency in English. Of the three groups, Indians indicated the highest level of proficiency in English.
- Chinese children generally had a less than positive attitude towards their mother tongue.

Is it part of who I am?

- The children are comfortable using English to express their religious identities; they do not necessarily link race with language.
- When a child was asked if speaking in Malay made him feel Malay, he replied: "I got the colour of Malay so I feel like Malay." He added that even if he spoke English, that would not make him feel less Malay.

Practical applications

"Each language that is in the mind and heart and soul of the child helps in the understanding and comprehension of the other languages," says Dr Vaish. "We need to find ways to accommodate these biliteral practices as an English-only or mother-tongue-only space can be quite constraining for the child."

For example, if a child cannot pronounce an English word but if he or she can write it in a different script then he or she would have understood and learned the word in his or her own way.

Dr Vaish feels that movies and music are great resources for teaching since most children watch a lot of movies and listen to music in their mother tongue. However, the current national school curriculum does not allow for popular culture to be incorporated into classroom pedagogy.

"This could be due to cultural reasons and the feeling that the text you encounter outside the classroom looks so different from traditional literacy texts. The child might feel that entertainment outside school are the fun things and are unrelated to school," explains Dr Vaish. "We should try to bridge this gap, and sensitively incorporate popular culture into the classroom."

The research team hopes that their findings can help teachers understand more about how their students feel about their own language and how they rate their language abilities. Teachers can use this information to address language areas that the children are weak in.

What was this project about?

There were two stages in the Sociolinguistic Survey. The first stage was the quantitative survey, which was administered face-to-face in the students' homes. A total of 668 Chinese, Malay and Indian students took part in this survey.

The second stage involved qualitative follow-up studies, which aimed to develop a clearer picture of the patterns of language use, ideology and proficiency of the students. Twelve students were involved in this part of the study.

The researchers planned an activity for the students each time they visited, such as visits to shopping malls and religious places. All these interactions were audio- and video-taped. As part of the qualitative study, the children were also given tape recorders and encouraged to record their exchanges with others as well as to keep a journal and log of their experiences, feelings and activities.

- > To read an earlier article on this project, go to **Issue 2** of *SingTeach*.
- > To read more about the project, go to www.crpp.nie.edu.sg



Voices

Don't Teach Your Kids to be Afraid of the World

*What's the difference between protecting kids from negative media and sheltering them from the real world? Siblings Cherian George and Mary Cherian have found the answer in *What's Up*, an award-winning newspaper for students that would make life easier for teachers.*

Never has it been so difficult to introduce children to the world we live in. As teachers, we are painfully aware that training students for the future also means helping them understand what's going on in the present. And as stories on sex scandals, suicide bombers and recession flood the headlines, one can't help but wonder how much we can really achieve in the classroom.

So what is the "right way" for young students to learn about current events? A good answer or resource would be *What's Up*, an award-winning newspaper which aims to report news in ways that are appropriate for young people. Founded by siblings Cherian George and Mary Cherian, *What's Up* advocates the idea that children can learn about what's happening in the world and still feel hopeful and optimistic about life. They do so through thought-provoking articles that's interesting and compelling for young people.

Sounds too good to be true? *SingTeach* talks to Mary about the tricky task of helping children deal with current events and how *What's Up* can help teachers go about it.

Q: Students today are spoilt for choice when it comes to reading material. What made you decide to create a newspaper like *What's Up* given the many resources already available to kids today?

Yes, students do have a wide range of reading material these days. When we started five years ago, there were several good magazines for students. However, none of them covered

world news and current affairs in the way that *What's Up* does.

Our main concern was that there was a great deal of bad news reaching children through adult media. Children were – and still are – exposed to horrific scenes of terrorism and natural disasters on TV, the internet and adult newspapers. It was time for a publication sharing world news with them but in child-appropriate ways. They need to know what is happening in the world – both good and bad – but be able to feel hopeful and optimistic about life.

We also identified a gap in periodicals for middle childhood and emerging teens. The market is flooded with early childhood and older teen reading material but there is a dearth of quality non-fiction for 9 to 13 year olds.

Q: Aside from getting students to read, how can current events help students learn about language?

When students are engaged in reading about current affairs, they absorb the nuances of language used to tell the stories. This provides us with opportunities as educators.

First, when we introduce and explain concepts that the stories illustrate, students learn not only these concepts but also how to use language to describe them. Take, for instance, the concept of "soft power". We've written about how countries use soft power effectively. Students may pick up the term itself as well as words and phrases that are in synchrony it. It's not just a matter of growing vocabulary – the words and phrases bring with them an understanding of real power that applies both at the global and personal levels.

Second, as a matter of policy, we try to be diversity-sensitive and inclusive in our language throughout *What's Up* and our websites. For example, we alternate male and female pronouns where appropriate; we say "wheelchair users" rather than "wheelchair-bound", and so on. We believe that students

immersed in such language develop sensitivity. Being inclusive and culturally sensitive leads to using inclusive language, but it can work the other way round, too: using diversity-sensitive language can, in turn, raise the student's awareness about what it means to be inclusive as a person. The parallel would be: you smile when you're happy, but smiling when you are sad can actually make you feel happier.

Third, we sometimes carry news stories about languages. Recent examples include information about an endangered language in Siberia and a dying language in Canada. We hope this deepens students' appreciation of their own languages: the value of keeping them alive and well.

Q: What are some of the ways teachers can use *What's Up* in the classroom?

Teachers can use *What's Up* in several ways. Many of our partner schools use the paper as a supplementary reader for English language lessons, with some teachers developing their own comprehension questions for the *What's Up* stories that they assign for students to read. It's also used for whole-level reading programmes. Typically, all classes of two or three levels read it before assembly in the hall or in their own classrooms. This is sometimes followed up with questions by a teacher, such as, "Which story did you like the most and why?"

We offer activity ideas on our website, www.newsforkids.com.sg IDEAS is a free teacher resource where teachers download the ready-to-print files of written exercises, project guidelines and other handouts. Every month, there are English, social studies, science, maths, CME and NE activities linked to *What's Up* stories. At times, there are also art, drama, music and even PE activities.

Mother Tongue teachers who teach CME can use *What's Up* along with the CME activities at IDEAS. The IDEAS handouts are in English but are easy to translate. Every month, there is also a PowerPoint presentation that teachers can download and use in the

classroom. Typically, it facilitates a whole-class discussion of a *What's Up* story. And, is accompanied by student handouts that are also downloadable from IDEAS.

What's Up is also a way to encourage students to write. Most often, it's for the Letters page. We deliberately set the hurdle low to let as many students as possible see their names in print. Those who have the interest and a flair for writing can contribute longer articles. Although *What's Up* is meant to be a newspaper for children and not by children, we've had some marvelous student contributors over the years. We should add that, in all these cases, they didn't need their teachers to intercede: the students took the initiative to approach us of their own accord, which is as it should be.

Q: There seems to be a thin line between values-driven journalism and "sheltering" kids from the real world. How do you keep this balance?

When we say we practise value-driven journalism, we mean that our selection of stories and how they are written are driven by values about what's appropriate for children to read and what they need to know. We won't include stories or pictures merely because they are juicy or titillating, even if they're splashed across grown-up media.

Neither could we be blind to the negative influences in advertisements. There are adult newspapers that carry the occasional educational article promoting healthy lifestyles and positive body image – but then accept an endless stream of ads for dubious diets and slimming centres, regardless of how they may hurt impressionable youth. We won't advertise for anything that wouldn't be considered wholesome or desirable for youth by the experts.

In that sense, we are indeed sheltering students – but only from what would be abusive to expose them to. Fortunately, the path we tread is well lit. For example, there's ample international research that suggests that children and young teens can be

traumatised even by second-hand exposure to violence just by, for instance, what they see on a screen. To grow up into confident, resilient adults, children need to feel safe and secure in this world. By excluding graphic details about terrorist acts, rapes and gory crimes against children, *What's Up* deliberately protects students from secondary exposure to what the experts say they are not psychologically ready for.

Do we have to worry about over-protecting them? Not really. The reality is that children and teens should be sheltered far more from some of the harsher realities of adult life than they are these days. Primary school children are not yet emotionally equipped to deal with much of it and that leaves them feeling fearful about growing up.

We must add that we don't exclude stories that are potentially the stuff of nightmares. If it's important for children to know what happened or if the story presents a teachable moment, we work hard to write it up in a child-sensitive way. For instance, we reported the violence in Sudan, the Bombay and London MRT bombings, the Iraq war, the Virginia Tech shootings and child abductions for slave labour in China. So, in fact, we probably have more serious, "real world" news than any other children's medium. We refuse to condescend to children by confining them to fantasy and entertainment, but neither will we sidestep our responsibility to give them something positive to believe in.

One reader recently said to us, "We're the generation that has been taught to be afraid of the world!" As professionals who care about children and teens, our challenge is to reduce that fear and help instil a sense of hopefulness and trust that there is more goodness than evil in human beings.

Q: What advice can you give teachers who feel unprepared to answer children's questions on sensitive issues such as terrorism, racism and genocide?

As adults, how do we answer even our own questions about such horrors? Terrorism,

racism, genocide and other human atrocities have been around for centuries but how do we explain our inability to stem their intrusion into the 21st century? Teachers who believe in giving honest answers – as we hope all teachers do – should let students know that there are many questions that adults struggle with as well.

There are some assurances we can give students: that for all the bad news that they hear, the majority of countries enjoy peace and the vast majority of people are good to each other. There is also comfort in knowing that there are attempts at practising justice, ranging from war crime tribunals at the international level to zero tolerance policies against aggression at school.

One of the most pressing questions that students tend to have is how they can protect themselves. That's an opportunity to reiterate the importance of taking Total Defence strategies very seriously. As a nation, we've resolved to take care of each other. Having tangible tasks to do in preparation can actually reduce children's anxiety considerably.

Beyond that, teachers can enable themselves to answer even the most difficult questions by turning to each other and to experts: like-minded professional peers and mentors at school, NIE faculty with the relevant expertise; publications such as *SingTeach* and other valuable resources.

Q: What are some of the things you hoped to achieve with *What's Up*? Do you feel that you've achieved some of these things already?

We wanted to be number one in quality and number one in value. The latter target is important, because we want *What's Up* to be within the means of lower-income families. We're proud of the fact that we've never raised our price in five years – despite the inflation that everyone's been feeling! We're probably the most affordable subscription around, and we want to keep it that way. Our best rate is for subscriptions

paid out of the Opportunity Fund, and we're delighted that we have several neighbourhood schools taking advantage of this to put *What's Up* in the hands of dozens of their poorer students.

Are we number one in quality? We'll let our readers judge for themselves. We certainly reached a landmark when, in 2006, the Society of Publishers in Asia honoured *What's Up* in its awards for editorial excellence. *What's Up* was the only children's publication to be recognised by SOPA. Subscription numbers are also gratifying. Teachers, parents and even primary school students are all discerning consumers these days. If we don't meet their needs, they'd have no qualms about dropping us. Instead, we've grown every year.

Unlike more profit-driven publications, though, we are not obsessive about these numbers. For the two of us, co-publishers, what's most important is that *What's Up* is fun to create, month after month. And that will only be the case if it's in harmony with our values and if it's something we think we'd have liked to read when we were that age (too long ago!). Since we haven't felt the urge to stop, we must be doing something right.

Mary Cherian is a former faculty member of the National Institute of Education. She is currently the director of allied health professionals at the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS).

Cherian George is a former *Straits Times* journalist who is now acting head of journalism at NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

Building a Good Structure

An action research study shows that teaching oral communication skills can simply be a matter of finding the right structure.

When South View Primary School's principal pointed out that the students' oral

communication scores were a concern, Yeow Mun Ching was not surprised.

"There's not much time in class to learn how to express yourself, let alone sustain it for five minutes!" she says. "Many of them are tongue-tied and lack the confidence to articulate their ideas. They don't know where to start or where to focus."

While some may consider this a simple case of students having nothing to say, Mun Ching felt that it was a question of providing the right guidance.

By using a step-by-step approach to teach oral expression, she found that students were not only more confident in expressing their thoughts but starting to be aware of the moral issues in the situations they encounter.

Finding the steps

Mun Ching admits that she first thought of developing a new approach because she wanted to "kill two birds with one stone". With the school implementing Oral-Practice Tutorials to help P6 students taking their PSLEs, combining the task of improving her students' oral skills and making them practise describing pictures (a typical question often asked during oral examinations in PSLE) seemed like a good way to save time and maximise school resources.

However, she was determined not to follow the usual method of "initiation-response-evaluation" – where the teacher's only role is to ask questions and assess the student's answer. "I thought it wasn't very helpful leaving students on their own," she says. "I wanted to explore a teaching strategy that would make learning more meaningful, less stressful and had greater retention."

The result is what Mun Ching calls *Directed Oral and Thinking (DOT)*, an approach which gives students a step-by-step process to follow when discussing a given situation. Using the catchy phrase, "Let's DICE it up!" (see box), students are encouraged to refer to four easy steps that can guide the way their answers "flow". According to Mun Ching, this

gives students a structure to fall back on instead of grappling for words to say.

Does it work?

Before they started using DICE, students were often limited to simply describing a picture's elements. If they felt that a picture depicted something "wrong", they were unable to explain why they thought so in the first place. In a way, the DICE framework addresses this problem by providing a path which goes from interpreting a situation to making a judgement about what they see. "It's not only evaluating what is right or wrong but coming out with justifications and moving forward to give recommendations," explains Mun Ching.

Mun Ching chose to use pictures which depict moral dilemmas, giving the DOT approach elements of values education as well. And while she doesn't expect every child doing the activity to be morally upright, she hopes to make an impact on the way students think about such issues in the future. "If we look at our role as teachers, education is not just intellectual development," she says. "I try to find every opportunity to inculcate values in pupils."

So far, feedback from students and fellow teachers has been encouraging. "They feel that they have something to talk about. Finally!" Mun Ching says proudly. "They are also a lot more confident during the oral exams. They have something to bring with them instead of not knowing what to expect."

Still, the DOT approach does not provide answers to all the difficulties students encounter in developing their oral skills. For students with limited vocabulary, Mun Ching recommends providing them with a list of words to help them express themselves more thoroughly. "If they say something is 'good', I ask them, 'What is good about it? Is he being considerate or civic-minded? Is he showing care or concern?'" Putting a little more effort into giving students extra support can go a long way.

Let's DICE it up!
Four easy steps to help your students communicate their ideas

- Describe
- Interpret
- Comment
- Evaluate

Spreading the word

With the DOT approach now implemented schoolwide, Mun Ching is happy to share her resources with more teachers. One step towards this was the NIE *Redesigning Pedagogy* conference in 2007 where she presented her findings to teachers from schools across Singapore.

And if you're wondering if the DOT approach will work for your classroom, Mun Ching has a simple word of advice, "Teaching is a contextual art so sometimes there is no best solution for all classes. Adaptation is something we have to do constantly. First, identify the gaps in your pupils' learning then maybe you can come up with your own activities to help them."

> Interested in learning more? Go to www.cripp.nie.edu.sg to read about a CRPP study on teaching oral communication.

Note: South View Primary School's Oral-Practice Tutorials are out-of-curriculum tuition sessions where teachers help P6 students hone their oral communication skills using resources that are consistent with those used in the PSLE. Teachers are given the freedom to choose their own teaching approaches. Mun Ching's DOT approach was developed from the OPT.

Yeow Mun Ching has been teaching primary school since 2004. She is interested in authentic assessments and holistic learning.

For more information or resources on the DOT approach, email her at yeow_mun_ching@moe.edu.sg



Share

SingTeach Recommends

Reading need not be dull, dreary, or even solitary. SingTeach approaches five well-read individuals to recommend books you can enjoy with your students.

"We read to know we are not alone," said celebrated author C. S. Lewis. Indeed, there is nothing that quite compares with a good read. To get us all started on some fruitful reading, *SingTeach* asks five well-read individuals to help you choose that perfect book you can enjoy and share with your students.

"**A Wrinkle in Time** by Madeleine L'Engle is a classic work of fiction for young adults. As a work of science fiction/fantasy, it neither patronises the imagination nor shies from the problems in the real world. The characters are extremely interesting and the ideas in the plot are thought-provoking."

~ Aaron Lee, prize-winning poet and author of *Five Right Angles*

"George Orwell's **Down and Out in Paris and London** brings journalism and 'live' investigative reporting to its extreme. Orwell gave up his comfortable life to be a tramp in the streets of Paris and London for 3 years. He did that because he wanted to know and write about how 'advanced and civilised societies' treat their poor and destitute. Through Orwell's eyes, **Down and Out** presents to us another perspective of life in a city."

~ Kenny Leck, co-owner of Books Actually

"I recommend the **Manga Shakespeare** series published by SelfMadeHero, UK. Teachers can use these texts as an initial introduction to the themes and language in Shakespearean plays such as **Macbeth**, **Romeo and Juliet**, and **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. The manga format is visually engaging and appealing especially to youths. Teachers may also encourage students to compare and contrast the manga version with the original text


version and then to discuss the effectiveness of different formats for storytelling."

~ Suzanne Choo, Teaching Fellow,
National Institute of Education

"At first glance, not many of us can relate to Mark Haddon's **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**, a tale of an autistic teen's search for his long-lost parent. Told from the protagonist's point of view, Haddon weaves a poignant, funny and heartbreaking story of, really, a teenager's search for meaning and place in this world. This book will entertain and enlighten the most cynical and sceptical of teenagers."

~ Lim Yi Lyn, Manager of Artistic Development
at The Arts House

"Terry Pratchett has the distinction of being the most 'shoplifted' author in Britain, and is the second most-read author in the UK. His Discworld novels are hilarious but behind the farcical comedy are razor-sharp social commentaries camouflaged as light entertainment. **Small Gods** is his subversive take on religion and faith. As you laugh at his jokes, you suddenly pause and think, 'Hey! That makes sense.'"

~ Dark Orpheus, blogger 

Teaching is as Easy as A to Z

Dindean Abalahin reveals where she finds the best tips on classroom management.

Being a preschool teacher sure has its ups and downs but one thing is for certain—you should be on your toes at all times because no one could predict how and what would pique these children's interest. And as teachers, we know once you've lost your children's interest in the classroom, it could only mean one thing—CHAOS!

Experienced teachers may find this easy to deal with, but what about the greenhorns? I'd say WING IT! And by that I mean draw out the

best strategy you could think off the top of your students back into the lesson. One website you may find useful in helping you develop these strategies is A to Z Teacher Stuff at <http://atozteacherstuff.com>

A to Z Teacher Stuff is a fabulous site for all things "teacher-y". Browsing through the site is a breeze. Different aspects for being a teacher are categorised accordingly. And what makes me visit the site often is the abundance of articles on classroom management and teacher sharing. For example, you can find articles like Robert Stahl's "Using Think-Time and Wait-Time Skillfully in the Classroom" which gives tips and discusses the importance of that "silent moment" for thought process to maximise learning in class.

One particularly useful feature of the site is the way they organise their material. One could immediately go directly to a particular

your head, implement it right away and yank category—whether for printable worksheets, teaching and classroom management tips, and fun teaching tools.

And although most of the subjects, themes, and links found on the site are American in orientation, it's easy to localise the topics by replacing subject matters with those your children are currently interested in—INTERESTED being the operative word here. Because no matter how well you plan your lesson, if you don't pique their interest, there is no point carrying on. So don't feel bad about throwing your lesson plan for the day out the window. And practice winging it!

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