Boys Talk: Learning a language for life

Outline

• Introduction
• Research design
• 3 Big Ideas
• Reflections
• Conclusion
• Video
• Question and Answer
Rationale

“...reading literature gave (me) wisdom, humanity and a capacity to empathise with others.”

Mr S. Rajaratnam, Singapore’s first Foreign Minister

Extract is taken from the Straits Times Think Tank, 3 February 2010

Research Question

This research project investigated the effectiveness of using a Reading Circle framework which SJI English Language teachers adapted to help foreign users of the English Language speak more confidently.
Aims

We want our students

• To develop skills of reading and speaking

• To reflect on issues raised in reading material and associate them with personal experiences

• To deepen their learning of a language that they can use for life

Mission

The Reading Circles Programme aims to provide opportunities for every student to develop a love for reading, nurture a habit of reflection and ultimately reap new knowledge.
**School mission**
‘to learn how to learn’ and ‘to learn how to live’

**Reading Circles Programme**

**PLC**
3 Big Ideas
4 Critical Questions

**3 Big Ideas**

No. 1: Ensuring students learn

No. 2: Building a culture of collaboration

No. 2: Focusing on student outcome
Preamble: 4 Critical Questions

“Was it learnt?” drives our research

• What is it we expect students to learn?
• How will we know when they have learned it?
• How will we respond when they don’t learn?
• How will we respond when they already know it?

Profile of foreign students

• ASEAN students (Vietnam, China and Indonesia)
• 7-10% of the level
• Strong in Mathematics and Science
• Weak in English, particularly oral communication
Main weaknesses

- Responses were fairly simple with little development.
- Not able to articulate their responses clearly.
- Require repeated promptings to sustain interactions with the examiners.
- Peculiar accents affected their pronunciation and articulation.

1st session: Le Thien’s self introduction

Key Features

- School mission
- Oral performance
- Focused Reading Circle Programme
- Clear structure
- Crisp process
- PLC
Why Reading Circle?

“Often boys receive less practice and have less experience in acknowledging the feelings of others, of understanding the world from someone else’s perspective. While they certainly retain this capacity, it is very helpful to give them the opportunity to ‘flex this muscle’. So much of success and ability to lead in the 21st century will be dependent on this aspect of their emotional intelligence.”

Taken from “Teaching Boys: A global study of effective practices” by Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley

Why Reading Circle?

- A Reading Circle is a group that meets to discuss particular problems or issues
- Students will read a selection of text, reflect on issues/problems and share their opinions during the meetings.
Focussed Reading Circle Programme

- Enabled boys to “extend themselves-mind, heart, interests, passion” into” the topics discussed.
- This “self-extension” makes the learning a “personal experience” for the boys, which ultimately, developed their empathy skills.

Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compulsory Reading</th>
<th>Clear Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills-based</strong> text (Personal Recounts, Narratives &amp; Expository)</td>
<td><strong>Use of PLC framework to drive the research</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progressive over 2 terms on a fortnightly basis and 5 sessions

**Crisp process**
Each teacher will ask 3 questions to guide the discussion. Students will take turns to share their responses and opinions.

**Teacher evaluation**
Each teacher will provide feedback to the students for every session using the Oral rubric.

**Student evaluation**
Each student will assess their participation in the discussion using the Contribution Meter rubric. Each student will write their reflection at the end of the programme.

Students - Personal enjoyment and peer learning

Teachers - Hones professional skills and foster rapport
Structure of Reading Circles

TR: Teacher as the facilitator will provide overall direction for the session

P: Participant of each group will share views and opinions

Figure 2

Stages of the research

1. Identify a focus
   - Compiles findings
   - *Meet regularly
   - *Respond to 3 questions
   - *Teacher and self evaluation

2. Devise strategies
   - Extend RC to foreign users

3. Implement the action plan
   - Reading Circle Programme
   - Teacher and self evaluation

4. Reflect on the strategies
   - Weak oral communication skills
Based on their nationality, these 20 students were put into 4 groups under the guidance of a teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Owen Yunaputra Kosman</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Mrs Mishaelle Chua</td>
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<td>2 Vincent Rijanto Heru</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>3 Nguyen Xuan Bach</td>
<td>304</td>
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<td>4 Yang Dichui</td>
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<td>5 Le Thien</td>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 Clifford Ananda Surya</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Mr Vinson Tan/ Mrs Chung Boon Siang</td>
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<td>7 Nguyen Gia Huy</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>8 Djunarto Ng</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>9 Timothy Co Tan</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
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<td>10 Hans Toby Limanto</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Hans Krisnata Muten</td>
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<td>Ms Adeline Ng</td>
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<td>Xu Jun</td>
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<td>Tran Hoang Minh</td>
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<td>Harvin Iriawan</td>
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<td>Nicolas Tarino</td>
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<td>Andree Hansen Wibowo</td>
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<td>Mr Krison Tan</td>
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<td>Wu Zhaoxuan</td>
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<td>Bui Thien Thanh</td>
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<td>Nguyen Dam Gia Bao</td>
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<td>Vincent Setiawan</td>
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</table>
Big Idea #1: Ensuring students learn

What is it we expect students to learn?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Guiding questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sorry, wrong number | Lucille Fletcher | 1. What are some important points one should take note of when speaking?  
2. How can we express ourselves more effectively? |
| A devoted son        | Anita Desai    | 1. Was Varma being unreasonable when he rejected his son’s advice and help? Why or why not?  
2. Do you think Rakesh was a good son to his father? Why or why not?  
3. What makes a ‘devoted’ son? |

Crisp process of questioning

1st question

Related to the story

2nd question

Related to their experiences

3rd question

Related to a social/broader issue
Big Idea #1: Ensuring students learn

How will we know when they have learned it?

**Teacher evaluation:**

Teachers evaluate the students based on their ability to offer personal responses in a coherent manner using apt vocabulary and structures.

I. Effect of Reading circle on enjoyment of story

Do you think Focused Reading Circle programme has a positive, neutral or negative effect on how much you enjoy the book you are reading?

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

75% thinks that the program has a positive effect on their enjoyment of the book
I. Effect of Reading circle on enjoyment of story

Do you enjoy sharing your opinions within a group?

(Pre-programme Survey)

Do you enjoy sharing your opinions within a group?

Most of the time | Sometimes | Not at all

70.00% | 60.00% | 50.00% | 40.00% | 30.00% | 20.00% | 10.00% | 0.00%

I. Effect of Reading circle on enjoyment of story

Do you enjoy sharing your opinions with the group now?

(Post-programme Survey)

Do you enjoy sharing your opinions with the group now?

Yes | No

100% | 80% | 60% | 40% | 20% | 0%
II. Improvement in oral communication

![Bar chart showing improvement in oral communication](chart1)

- Time to interact and exchange ideas with my friends about a story: 92.3%

![Pie chart showing improvement in class participation](chart2)

- Do you speak up more often in class now?: 83.3%
III. Improvement in reading skills

![Bar chart showing the percentage of people who think their reading skills have improved]

III. Improvement in comprehension skills

![Pie chart showing how much discussion questions helped understand the stories]
III. Improvement in comprehension skills

How helpful were the discussions for your understanding of the story?

- Extremely helpful
- Helpful
- A little helpful
- Not helpful at all

Big Idea #1: Ensuring students learn

How will we know when they have learned it?

Self-evaluation:

Students are involved in self-evaluation of their discussion skills using a checklist.
**Results from students’ contribution metre**

- Half of the respondents indicated that they have improved in the skill of giving personal response with substantiation and elaboration.
- More than half the students in the program indicated that they have improved in the area of listening to others’ point of view when it differs from their own.
- Half of the respondents also indicated that in terms of using appropriate tone suited to an academic discussion in a small group sharing, they have also improved.
- One-third of the respondents indicated an improvement in their use of good eye contact during group discussion and sharing.
- One-third of the respondents also showed improvement in being an effective communicator as they would ask ‘piggy-back’ questions for clarification or to learn more. Similarly, 4 students indicated that they made more use of the discussion to get their queries answered. This reflects an engagement in discussion through the process of clarification.
- One-third of the students indicated they improved in their elaboration skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Skills</th>
<th>Elaboration of Skills involved</th>
<th>Students who showed improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I listen to what other participants say in my group.</td>
<td>Non-verbal cues: Listening (Oral)</td>
<td>2:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Indonesian</td>
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<td>1 Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I have a different point of view, I express it politely.</td>
<td>Communication skills suited to purpose, audience and context: using appropriate tone suited to an academic discussion in a small group sharing</td>
<td>6:</td>
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<td>2 Indonesian</td>
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<td>2 China</td>
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<tr>
<td>If someone disagrees with me, I listen and try to think it through from their point of view.</td>
<td>Empathy skills: perspective-taking (IBSC)</td>
<td>7:</td>
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<td>3 Indonesian</td>
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<td>3 Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use good eye contact- when someone asks a question, I look at them so they know I am interested in what they are saying and appreciate their contribution.</td>
<td>Non-verbal cues: establishing eye-contact</td>
<td>4:</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I ask a ‘piggy-back’ question when someone’s question or response makes me want to learn more. (Can you talk more about…?)</td>
<td>Effective communication: clarification</td>
<td>4:</td>
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<td>1 China</td>
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<tr>
<td>I answer questions with elaboration and explanation that I have read from the short stories or articles.</td>
<td>Personal response is developed, coherent; student willingly shares ideas, opinions and takes initiative to discuss relevant issues.</td>
<td>4:</td>
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<td>1 Indonesian</td>
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<td>2 China</td>
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<td>1 Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>I give personal opinions about issues when it is appropriate and back up my opinions with facts and examples.</td>
<td>Personal response with elaboration/substantiation</td>
<td>6:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3 Indonesian</td>
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<td>1 China</td>
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<td>2 Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>I prepare for the discussion by reading the stories and preparing the responses beforehand.</td>
<td>Interest and enjoyment (IBSC)</td>
<td>4:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1 China</td>
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<td>2 Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>I make use of the discussion to help me get my queries answered.</td>
<td>Discussion aids comprehension; reflects engagement in discussion through clarification</td>
<td>4:</td>
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<td>1 China</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Vietnamese</td>
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Big Idea #1: Ensuring students learn

How will we respond when they don’t learn?

Students are given feedback so that they can improve on their weaknesses in the next session.
Big Idea #1: Ensuring students learn

How will we respond when they already know it?

- Able to offer personal responses
- Expression of ideas was clear
- Responds well to questions

Last session: Toby on the topic of capital punishment

Reflections of teachers and students

- Shed their inhibitions of speaking English.
- International mix ensured they don’t lapse into their native tongue.
- A chance to learn from students and colleagues
- Discussions were culturally enriching.
Reflections of teachers and students

“I have quality talks with my friends and teachers instead of mindless chatter.”

“I can speak freely and understand the issue better in a small group.”

“It has helped me to grow as a person. I learnt not to give up.”

“I learnt to listen and maintain eye-contact when I speak in a group.”

Success factors

• Strong support from teachers
• Clear expectations and outcomes articulated to the students
• Strong focus on peer collaboration and pupil-centred activities
• Active facilitation by the EL teachers
• Structured approach to use good spoken English during the sessions
**Limitations**

- Manpower constraints, insufficient number of sessions
- Inconsistent attendance of students
- Choice of themes and selection of articles
- ‘Standard’ accents take time to develop

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**Conclusion**

**Reading Circle programme**

- Offers a structure for discussion to take place
- Breaks down the inhibition faced by foreign users of the language
- Promotes life-long learning
- Lots of potential in what it can accomplish

- Life-long passion in learning
- Confident speaker
- Critical thinker