

Using group discussion as an intervention strategy in novel teaching to study students' attitudinal changes

於小說教學時利用小組討論為介入策略
觀察學生態度轉變

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Abstract

This case study explores attitudinal changes through using group discussion as an intervention strategy for teaching novels in a primary school in Hong Kong. Comprehension, application and synthesis questions were used to promote higher order thinking skills and positive risk taking behaviors amongst students. The research question was to what extent group discussion serves as an intervention strategy to enhance emotional maturity in students. Data was collected through observations, documentations, journals and group interviews. Data analysis suggests a higher percentage of students choose the “application” and “synthesis” type questions. It was found that the amount of time given to students impact on the length and quality of students' answers. The requirement to copy the questions impacted on students' choice of questions. Both classes experienced change in the choice of questions over the reading week. Teachers are more aware of the complexity of conducting research in a classroom setting and the importance of balancing the roles of language teachers and researchers with the support of a school-based professional learning community.

Keywords

attitudinal changes, emotional maturity, group discussion, novel teaching

摘要

本個案研究是有關一間香港的小學於小說教學時，利用小組討論作為介入策略時學生的行為轉變。透過閱讀理解、應用以及綜合性的題型，令學生提升高階思維能力和正面冒險行為。本研究問題是同儕指導與小組討論作為介入策略對提高情緒成熟有多少影響。數據分析發現，較多學生選擇應用以及綜合性題型的班別的改變比較大。完成個案研究後，老師對學生學習能力及方式有更深認識。老師能注意到課室內進行研究的複雜性，以及在校本專業學習的環境下平衡作為語言老師及研究員的重要性。

關鍵詞

態度轉變，情緒成熟，小組討論，小說教學

1. Background

One of the major challenges in curriculum for teachers in Hong Kong is how to promote the higher order thinking skills, by allowing students to take positive risks when it comes to answering high order level questions. As teachers, we tend to ask questions in the “knowledge” category for about 80% to 90% of the time in class. These questions are fundamental to learning, but using them all the time may pose hurdles to high order thinking development in students. Higher order level questions require much more “brain power” and a more extensive and elaborate answers (Bloom, et al, 1956, Costa 2000).

Diocesan Boys’ School Primary Division is adopting a more inquiry-based learning curriculum in 2009-2010 hence teachers responded to the need by examining an alternative approach to teaching novel studies. Students are self-motivated and eager to learn, and demonstrate patience and perseverance in tackling challenging learning tasks. However,

our students tend not to collaborate effectively when asked to share their answers and opinions in a group setting.

Approaches to teaching literature with respect to novel studies in previous years by many teachers within the Department of English focused primarily on “knowledge” type questions. Due to the Department’s initiative to develop more options when approaching literature studies, the need for inclusion of higher order thinking questions became apparent not only to challenge the studies but also to make teaching varied.

In the school development plan for the English Department in 2009-2010, we aim to further enhance students’ learning performance and to enable them to master and manipulate various generic skills and demonstrate good and independent learning abilities. An Exploratory Practice Committee was set up to give teachers opportunities to conduct research in a classroom setting, to improve and to reflect on students’ learning and teaching practices.

This study aims to get students to change their attitudes towards attempting to answer synthesis type questions after they have shared their answers with their peers in a group setting. Using group discussion as an intervention strategy, as a result, students will have the opportunity to develop their collaborative skills and be encouraged to take risks when answering higher order thinking questions.

2. Literature Review

Vygotsky stated that learning awakens in children a variety of internal developmental processes that can operate only when they interact with more competent people in their environment and in cooperation with their peers (Vygotsky, 1978). When children scaffold each other, they modify a task and offer assistance to each other to help complete the task (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1988). According to Thelen’s principal of least-sized groups, we should strive for a group as small as possible but that has all the expertise and diverse points of view necessary to complete the task well (Thelen, 1954). Most teachers in general find that it is easier to conduct group discussions in smaller groups as each member will have more opportunities to participate and share their opinions and answers with each other. Smaller groups are also easier to handle for teachers when it comes to classroom management. According to researchers, children at 11 years old begin to reason abstractly (Atherton, 2009). Therefore we selected Grade five students in this study as they are expected and required to answer questions of different levels of difficulty. Based on

findings, children around 11 years old are at the stage where they are emotionally, socially and intellectually developing (Wood, 1998). Through exposure to questions that differ in cognitive skills, children will develop more confidence in choosing to answer questions that require creativity, imagination and critical thinking skills.

Grade five students were chosen for this study because children are at the stage where they are emotionally, socially and intellectually developing. Emotional maturity is defined as the strength and courage to actualize individual abilities within the frame of social demands (Landau & Weissler, 1998). Emotionally, ten and eleven year olds are usually cooperative, easygoing, friendly and agreeable. At the social level, friendships and activities with age mates flourish. They want to be a part of the group and do not want to stand alone in competition (Wood, 1998). Finally, intellectually, children at this age are verbal. Making ethical decisions becomes a challenging task. They are able to express ideas and feelings in creative ways. More importantly, at eleven years old, children begin to reason abstractly (Atherton, 2009). Therefore, this group of students are chosen to participate in this study. It is hoped that the study will help language teachers make informed decisions when incorporating emotion related elements into the language program.

3. Assumptions

There are two assumptions for this study:

Assumption 1: Through the interventions, students will become more willing to take risks to answer higher order thinking questions and thus become more willing to tackle these questions on their own initiative the next time they encounter them.

Assumptions 2: In addition to cognitive maturity that comes with age for grade 5 students, group discussion can serve as an intervention strategy to enhance emotional maturity in students.

The study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Are students more willing to take risks to answer high order questions after going through the interventions? What are the reasons behind their move?
2. Does group discussion serve as an intervention strategy to enhance emotional maturity in students? If yes, how? If no, why?

4. Methodology

To explore the research questions, changes and rearrangements were made in the curriculum. The teaching of the novel was conducted in a six-day teaching cycle to allow for more in-depth group discussions. In addition, the novel is not formally assessed, thus releasing students from pressure and allowing ample room for them to express their views and ideas.

4.1 Curriculum Organization

There are 2 books for Reading for each level. "Frindle" is one of the novels chosen for Grade 5. It is a novel written by Andrew Clements. The school chose it in 2008-2009, and almost all the boys in the level liked it, so it was chosen again for the 1st term of academic year 2009-2010. The book explores the inquisitive nature of young boys with respect to authority. The themes of the book also provided students with thought-provoking situations for students' deliberations and making choices. Students also found it easy to identify with the characters in the book as the plot focuses on daily school life at the primary level. There are 15 chapters broken into 6 modules taught in the 'reading week' (See Table 1).

There were 3 interventions throughout the project. Each intervention was carried out using group discussions. Students were grouped according to the selection of the questions.

Table 1: Arrangement of the lessons and interventions

Dates (Dec.)	Modules	Chapters	Interventions	Grouping	Activities
7 th	1	1-3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biography of the author - Introduction and summary of the novel - Answering a question from module 1
8 th	2	4-5			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language support for novel reading - Whole class discussion - Answering a question from module 2 and 3

Dates (Dec.)	Modules	Chapters	Interventions	Grouping	Activities
9 th	3	6-8	1 st	Mixed-ability grouping of students according to their choice of questions	- Briefing on how to conduct group discussion - 7-minute group discussion - Ss' reflections - Answering a question from module 4
11 th	4	9-10	2 nd	ditto	- 7-minute group discussion - Ss' reflections - Answering a question from module 5
14 th	5	11-12	3 rd	ditto	- 7-minute group discussion - Ss' reflections - Answering a question from module 6
15 th	6	13-15			- Wrapping-up - Role playing

We designed questions for each module in 3 levels of challenge, i.e. Comprehension questions, Application questions and Synthesis questions. For example, the following questions are designed for Module 5 on Chapters 11-12. (see Appendix for the full set of questions):

1. You are Nick. What would you do with the first cheque you got from Bud Lawrence?
2. Do you think Bud and Mr. Allen's deal is fair? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
3. If you were Nick's dad, would you keep the money a secret from Nick? Why or why not? Explain your answer.

As the above table shows, we did three interventions. For each intervention, we briefed our students on how a proper group discussion is conducted. Then students were asked to get into groups assigned by the teacher. The group encompassed at least one student from each of the three question types. Students were given instructions on how to do a 7-minute discussion. During the discussion, students were asked to share their

own responses to the question they had answered. The group leader also asked prompting questions like, “Why did you choose to answer that question” to get students to think and share, as a group, at a deeper level. Each group had a group leader to invite shy students to speak and to ensure every student had a chance to do some sharing. After the discussion, students were required to reflect on their discussions and identify problems. The teacher then projected the next set of questions onto the screen, read out each question and explained them. Each student was asked to answer only one question out of three in class.

4.2 Research Design

Table 2: Methods of Data Collection

When	How (methods of collection)	What
7 th -15 th December	observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - video 3 interventions - observe all modules - debriefing after each intervention
7 th -15 th December	documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ss' question/answer sheets - diaries - interview transcription - recordings (videos and audios)
after each intervention	journal	Teachers' reflective journals after each intervention
after all interventions	group interview (semi-structured)	2 groups (3 students from 5J and 5S) and 20 minutes for each group

4.3 Selecting Target Groups

To investigate the effects of curriculum changes of novel teaching, target groups were carefully chosen and various research methods were employed to address the research questions, such as to what extent group discussion serves as an intervention strategy to enhance emotional maturity in students. There are 5 classes in Grade 5. Four of them share similar level of proficiency in English while one is more advanced. Class 5D was chosen to do the pilot study. Class 5J (29 students) and Class 5S (32 students) were randomly chosen for the study as experiment groups. The other two classes, Class 5P (29 students) and Class 5M (30 students), were controlled groups, not using any intervention strategy.

4.4 Data Collection

Various types of data collection methods, such as observations, group interviews, journals and documentations, were adopted to collect the data for this study at different phases throughout the study.

5. Findings

On completion of the reading week, sets of data were analyzed for findings in response to the assumptions of the study. Initial findings from analyzing students' responses to the questions indicate that despite changes identified in their choices of questions over the period, there was not a definite pattern of move in the levels of questions chosen. We attempted to script verbatim all answers from students and sort out on (1) question basis, (2) individual student basis, and selected student responses basis. Brief findings are explained in the following sessions.

5.1 On question basis

To find out how students responded to the prescribed questions, all questions attempted are sorted out and grouped into numbered categories. The responses are further sub-divided into yes/no, right/wrong, good/smart/bad etc. according to the nature of the questions. The prime purpose of doing this categorization is to capture students' responses to all the questions attempted. This serves as the basis for subsequent analysis on individual responses. Initial findings from the analysis of the first sets of question indicate that students' responses in the first module were generally short and direct with little elaboration. Taking into consideration the comparatively short time allowed for students to copy and answer the questions in the lesson, their short concise responses to the first set of questions were not surprising. Indeed, it was also found that the requirements to copy the questions also impacted on students' choice of questions. They tended to choose the short questions instead of the long ones. This move was remedied by teachers who instructed the students not to copy the questions from the second intervention lesson onwards. Such a move impacted on students' choice of questions since they would choose questions other than the shortest ones in subsequent modules.

5.2 On individual basis

Individual students' responses to questions attempted are sorted out to identify first

for their choices and next for the pattern of choice. The prime purpose of such grouping is to identify changes in students' choices of questions after the interventions. The absolute number of students making various choices is counted and the percentage of students choosing various levels of questions (easy, medium and difficult as suggested by teachers) is calculated. Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate the general trend of choice of questions over the reading week.

These graphs help to illustrate whether the change is obvious. Both classes experienced change in the choice of questions over the reading week. The trend is more obvious in 5J which had a high proportion of students choosing 'comprehension' question in the first two modules. But choice of medium to high level, the trend is different for 5S class. A large number of students opted for a 'difficult' question in the first lesson. It dropped drastically in the second lesson but the trend grew up gradually in the remaining lessons. Generally speaking, if we compared the trend with the implementation of the intervention strategy, the change in 5J is more obvious from the third lesson onward. A much higher percentage of students chose the 'application' and 'synthesis' questions in the last two modules. Such changes were also identified in 5S. But it should be noted that students were attracted by the 'comprehension' question in Chapters 9-10 and both classes experienced a big drop in the choice of the higher level questions. But this trend was reverted in the fifth and the sixth lessons when students were tuned in to the group discussion in the reading lessons. They were more willing to choose questions that were more challenging. This was echoed in the student interview described in the section of Analysis of Student Interview.

Figure 1: Choice of questions by P5J students over the reading week

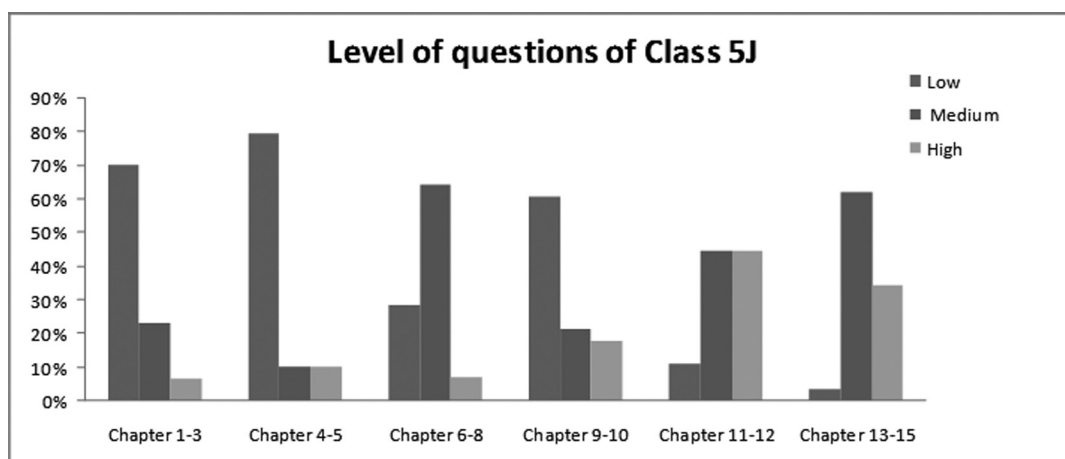
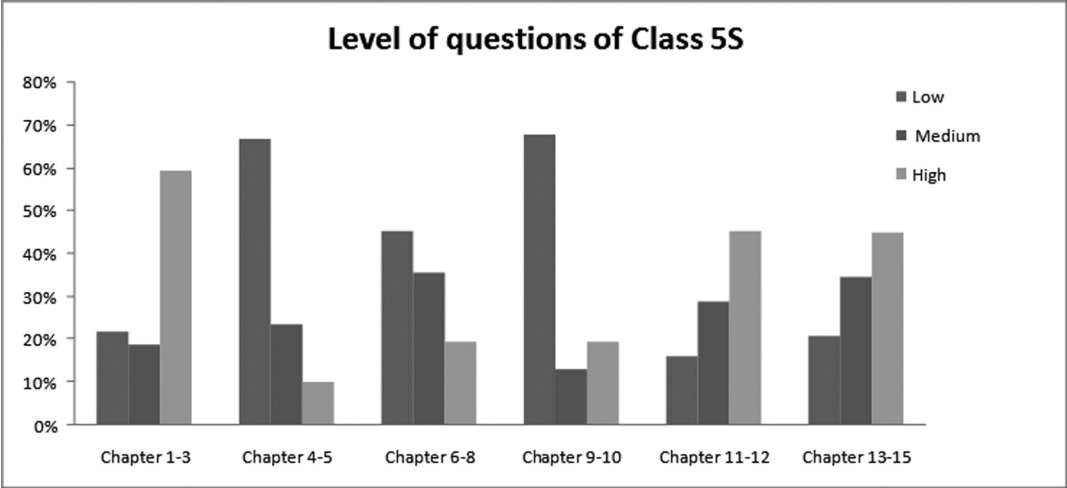


Figure 2: Choice of questions by P5S students over the reading week



5.3 On selected student responses basis

Attempt is made to identify patterns of choices of questions through examining all the students’ responses to questions. The following pattern of choice is revealed in selected students:

Seven students displayed an “up” trend in the choice of questions; moving from comprehension questions to synthesis questions. Two students displayed a “down” trend in the choice of question; moving from synthesis questions to comprehension questions. One student chose all number 2 questions throughout.

5.4 Analysis of student interview

Students’ interview was transcribed verbatim for their views on the reading week in general and the intervention strategy in particular. Their perception of the question levels was also solicited in order to compare with the teachers’ categorization of the questions.

Six students from two classes were selected to have an interview on their general impression of the novel, their learning experiences in group discussion and their views on the challenge levels of the questions. When students were prompted to talk about the novel, they all expressed that they liked the story because it was funny and interesting.

And they liked the way their teacher taught the book in the reading week because they enjoyed group discussion, shared their ideas with their classmates and presented it in the whole class.

When asked how they chose their questions, the students responded:

Student A: *I'll pick up the one which is more interesting and challenging. Pick the one that needs to write more.*

Student B: *I will pick questions. My answer has more things to write about or more interesting, I will pick that.*

Student C: *It's challenging. We can use our brain. I always chose number three. All of the questions are properly arranged.*

From the above students' interview answers, it is noted that some students were aware of the questions were arranged in different levels of challenge and they would like to choose those challenging questions to answer.

In the interview different students had different perceptions of the group discussion. The following responses show how students thought about the discussions.

Student A: *Discussion is useful. Because it is an exercise to practice talking. I learn friendship. Because you need friendship to make a team group. I would encourage them to speak more and explain more.*

Student B: *It could practice our English talk frequent because we usually speak Cantonese with our friend and discussion would make our English speaking more fluent. You need to listen others opinion, but not only using to your skills.*

The above responses indicate that students enjoyed group discussion because they considered discussions useful in that they helped them practice English and share their ideas with others. However, it is noted that students had different views on the levels of challenge for the questions. In the interview, some of the students made the following comments:

Student A: *I would choose different questions for different chapters. Because each chapter has challenging questions. These questions are not in order.*

Interviewer: *Oh, Yeah. You know the questions are not in the order. So which one is more challenging?*

Student A: *Of course Number three.*

Interviewer: *How about you? Which set of questions did you choose?*

Student B: *Arr..... I chose that, may be a challenging one.*

Interviewer: *Which Set?*

Student B: *Like chapters six to eight, those are harder because they know how the parents feel when you use the word “frindle” and you have to stay after school for detention.*

Interviewer: *You think that is most challenging.*

Student B: *Because you are not parents, so you don't know really how to answer the questions.*

Interviewer: *Which one is the least challenging?*

Student B: *Chapter one to three.*

Interviewer: *You mean the whole set of questions.*

Student B: *Right.*

Interviewer: *So, you think that the questions are arranged in the way that chapter one to three are least challenging...*

Student B: *Yeah. Easy, move along to chapter thirteen to fifteen. That set is more challenging.*

Interviewer: *Okay, what do you think? (Turned to Student)*

Student C: *Because at start, they don't really make challenging questions because it will be easy at first.*

Interviewer: *The second set is more difficult?*

Student C: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *And the third set getting on more difficult? That's what you think of your questions, right?*

Interviewer *(Turned back to Student A): Could you please tell your classmates about what you think of the questions?*

Student A: *I think each chapter has the most challenging questions and it is usually of feeling of others, you are pretending to be different people to look back at you. Like my parents looking at me to tell bad or good of me. You know, something like that.*

The following table shows the views of the students on levels of questions and the question levels set by teachers. The highlighted boxes are the choice of students matched with teachers'. It is noticed that students' view on the level of questions is different from that of the teachers'. For example, in chapter 1-3, teachers consider question 3 is an application (medium) question but none of the students thought that question is an application question. Three of them thought that is a synthesis (difficult) question. This applied also to question 3 in chapter 13-15, although teachers consider that it is an application question, four students thought that this is a synthesis (difficult) question.

Table 3: Students' and Teachers' view on levels of questions

	Question	Teacher	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E
Chapter 1-3	1	difficult	easy	easy	medium	medium	difficult
	2	easy	difficult	difficult	easy	difficult	medium
	3	medium	difficult	difficult	difficult	easy	easy
Chapter 4-5	1	easy	medium	easy	easy	easy	easy
	2	medium	difficult	medium	difficult	medium	medium
	3	difficult	difficult	difficult	medium	difficult	difficult
Chapter 6-8	1	easy	difficult	difficult	medium	easy	medium
	2	medium	difficult	easy	easy	difficult	difficult
	3	difficult	difficult	difficult	difficult	medium	easy
Chapter 9-10	1	difficult	medium	medium	easy	medium	medium
	2	easy	easy	medium	medium	easy	easy
	3	medium	easy	difficult	difficult	difficult	difficult
Chapter 11-12	1	easy	medium	difficult	medium	medium	difficult
	2	medium	easy	medium	easy	easy	medium
	3	difficult	difficult	medium	difficult	difficult	easy
Chapter 13-15	1	difficult	difficult	difficult	medium	easy	medium
	2	easy	medium	difficult	easy	medium	easy
	3	medium	medium	difficult	difficult	difficult	difficult

5.5 Analysis of video lessons

Video lessons are transcribed in selective vignettes to illustrate students' interaction related to discussion focus. Group interaction skills are also identified in the video vignettes. Relevant students' talk and conversation are also transcribed for evidence of the impact of the intervention strategy on students' choice of questions and explanation.

In the first lesson, teacher introduced the novel and asked students to answer the question from module one. No intervention was attempted. In the second lesson, teacher conducted a whole class discussion and students were requested to answer the questions for module two and three. In the third lesson wherein the intervention strategy was first introduced, teacher instructed students to share their answers to questions in the previous modules. A total of three 7-minute discussion sessions were conducted. Teacher asked one student from each group to share his answer. It appeared that students needed teacher's constant prompting to elaborate their generally brief and direct answers. Before the end of lesson, students were asked to answer the questions on the next module.

The discussions session was started from 3rd lesson. It is found that there was a drop in the level of questions, 41% of students' question choice fell from high to low/medium or medium to low after in the third module, indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Students' choice of question after the 1st intervention

	Class 5J (%)	Class 5S (%)	Overall (%)
Low to high	3	6	5
Low to Medium	7	9	8
Medium to High	10	6	8
Medium to Low	43	22	32
High to Low	0	13	6
High to Medium	3	3	3
Unchanged and Absent	33	41	37

In the fourth lesson, the teacher showed a video taken the day before to explain how a proper group discussion was like. Students were told to share their answers. The video took effect and most of the groups were on tasks. Teacher reinforced the group discussion skills through asking each group to give scores to the performance of their classmates in the discussion. Students were then asked to answer the questions in the next module.

On analyzing students' choice of questions after the group discussion in the fourth lesson, 62% of the students moved from low to medium/high or medium to high in their question choice for module 5.

Table 5: Students' choice of question after the 2nd intervention

	Class 5J (%)	Class 5S (%)	Overall (%)
Low to high	20	31	26
Low to Medium	27	25	26
Medium to High	7	13	10
Medium to Low	0	0	0
High to Low	3	6	5
High to Medium	0	9	5
Unchanged and Absent	43	16	29

On completion of the 5th module, 56% of the students remained unchanged in the level of question choice, indicated in the following table:

Table 6: Students' choice of question after the 3rd intervention

	Class 5J (%)	Class 5S (%)	Overall (%)
Low to high	6	10	8
Low to Medium	0	3	2
Medium to High	3	7	5
Medium to Low	0	13	6
High to Low	0	3	2
High to Medium	22	20	21
Unchanged and Absent	69	43	56

6. Discussions

In this study, we find some interesting points as follows:

6.1 Correlation between emotional maturity and question selection

Students' selection of questions may be directly related to the length of the questions if asked to copy them. During the 1st intervention, students were asked to copy the questions they chose. It was found that they tended to choose short questions (in terms of the length). Then we changed our strategy, so no questions were to be copied. Students were asked to give answers only. However, it is also noted that the amount of time given for students to answer the question in the class could impact on the length and quality of their answers. Teachers' expectations on the length of the answer required of them could also be an influential factor. When we compare their answers for the first modules to those in the last module when students were requested to write at least 100 words in 10 minutes, we notice that their answers are comparatively longer and more substantial.

Focus should be on which type of question chosen instead of quality of students answers / further sharing of responses done in discussion.

Students' choice of questions changed after intervention– trends and development. Students were more willing to take risks in choosing questions of synthesis and application types. It is more prominent in 5J's performance after the first two interventions, comparing with that of 5S.

Students' perspectives on classifying the questions were different from those of the teachers'.

Students did not know that the questions were classified into three types. Quite a few preferred the application or synthesis types to the comprehension type which, however, was considered easier to answer from teachers' perspectives. As mentioned above, students tended to choose shorter questions (in terms of length) which should have suggested a preference to easy-to-answer questions but the data showed that our students' perspectives on classifying the questions were different from ours'.

From the students' interview, they were asked to rank the questions in challenge levels. Half of them thought the questions were arranged in ascending order of challenge, with easy questions to begin with in module 1 and challenge levels increased as the modules progressed through to the most challenging questions in the last module. However, some students considered that each chapter had its own challenging questions. In his words, *"I think each chapter has challenging questions. It is usually about the feeling of others. You are pretending to be a different people to look back at you."* However, one student had a different view. *"Ascending order of challenge. Easiest at the very beginning, and then is most difficult at the end."*

From the above answers, it is found that most students interviewed believed that the questions were in ascending order of challenge, except one student who thought that each chapter had a challenging question.

6.2 Effects of language ability

Most of our students are capable of expressing their thoughts quite fluently. However, many of them chose questions which they found interesting and were short in length to answer. When students were given clear instructions as to how many words they were required to put down in their answers and more time was given to them, they elaborated on their answers.

6.3 Effectiveness of group discussion

Group discussions facilitate group work. Almost all students enjoyed group discussions, including those shy ones. It was, however, inevitable that a small number of students did not get themselves involved in the activities at all. Fortunately no dominations were taken place. This was echoed in students' interview, students described their classmates' feelings about the group discussions.

Student A: *You need to listen to others' opinion, but not only using your skills.*

Student B: *I would encourage them to speak more and explain more.*

Student C: *I asked them to give more opinion so that may be my teacher and make me think creative. He gave more answers.*

Student A: *Some of the teammates just sat there and didn't think.*

Another group of students recalled:

Interviewee: *And how did you prompt them to say more in the discussion?*

Student D: *So we asked them "why you choose that question" or "can you choose another more challenging questions?" like that.*

Student E: *They talked about the ideas. Usually they answered the easiest questions.*

Student D: *Ya. Exactly. They always said when I ask "do you want to try another challenging question?" Some say yes but some say no.*

6.4 Overall effectiveness of the programme organization, implementation and intervention strategies

Due to time constraints, the overall effectiveness of the programme organization, implementation and intervention strategies was not that effective. Teachers struggled to strike a balance in their roles as language teacher and teacher researcher at the same time. Altogether, the novel was taught within a 6-day schedule. Students also had to be trained in holding group discussions; hence teachers also had to spend time addressing the strategies for effective group work. It was also a challenge to keep the students on task. However, after playing a demonstration of a group discussion that was recorded in a previous lesson, students saw what they were expected to do and which areas they had to improve on. Also the assigning of student roles in group discussions was helpful in keeping students focused.

6.5 Teachers development

After conducting this study, we have a deeper understanding of our students' abilities

and learning styles. It was observed that most students enjoyed participating in group work when clear guidelines and expectations are given to them. Many were willing to share their ideas and opinions which influenced each other. We have also decided for the future, more time should be spent on the teaching of a novel to allow teachers and students to do discussions, reflect and also focus on the literary teaching aspects of the novel.

In addition, we have learnt how to conduct research in the classroom setting, gone through various struggles in balancing teacher and researcher roles, working together in the planning and implementation of the project and writing a report. Lastly, our findings will be shared with our colleagues in the English department as part of teachers' professional development.

6.6 Difficulties

Throughout the study, some difficulties were encountered. For example, the appropriate wording of "comprehension", "application", "synthesis" type question including the length of each question as discovered, students tend to select a question based on its length and not necessary its type when asked to copy the question down into their copy book.

It was also discovered that some students gave elaborate answers to comprehension questions while some students gave only simple descriptive short answers to "challenging" questions. Questions and answers did not necessarily match teachers' expectations, i.e. "challenging" questions should draw rich description and reasoned responses.

It was interesting to find that one teacher was able to focus on her task assigned to her, which was to get this study completed, while the other struggled a lot in balancing to meet the requirements of the study and to satisfy the needs of her students, like role-playing and doing other activities apart from discussions. It demonstrates the language teachers' struggle to strike a balance between language teaching and research initiatives and how their perceptions and actions cast impact on the implementation of the intervention strategy that aimed to bring about students' attitudinal changes.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, with regards to doing research, at this point in time, although the data

indicates that there was a positive shift towards students voluntarily opting to respond to synthesis type questions, further studies are needed to be done to see whether this shift is sustained.

When given the opportunity to share through group discussions amongst peers, students, once understanding that a synthesis question can be discussed openly without the fear of being challenged students become more willing to opt to respond to these types of questions.

After we completed our research, we made the following recommendations. In terms of curriculum organization, one issue concerned the time frame set for the reading week. We believed that a longer duration of time for the reading week could have better accommodated both literary learning and doing classroom research.

Some recommendations for doing group activities are as follows:

1. Brief and train students on how a proper group discussion is conducted prior to the group discussions to make students aware of their expected performance.
2. Assigning a group leader, a time controller and a noise controller in each group helps students to be more involved and focused in the group discussions.
3. Teachers should ensure that the physical setting of the classroom is conducive to group work for how group work is to be done thus allowing smooth transition into a group sharing environment.
4. In order to allow meaningful group discussions, students should be coached on the skills of questioning especially how to ask prompting questions.
5. Create authentic communicative tasks rather than tasks solely focused on language practice.
6. Constantly revise what was planned to make improvements as a result of what emerges while doing research. For example, students tended to answer the shortest questions when asked to copy the question down. Therefore, in the next lesson, they were only asked to write down the question number rather than writing out the entire question.

References

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Appendix (Questions for each module)

(1) Frindle Questions Chapters 1-3:

1. Nick's parents have a rule that children have to do their homework first. What made Nick's parents come up with this rule? Explain your answer.
2. Would you like to be in Nick's class? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
3. If you were to be put on one of the three lists made by Mrs. Granger (really good kids, really smart kids, or really bad kids) which list would you be on? Explain your answer.

(2) Frindle Questions Chapters 4-5:

1. If you don't know a particular word, how do you go about finding out its meaning?
2. If a friend of yours was feeling nervous about giving a presentation, what advice would you give him?
3. You are Nick. Explain why you think side-tracking Mrs. Granger is right or wrong.

(3) Frindle Questions Chapters 6-8:

1. Do you think Mrs. Granger's punishment is fair? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
2. How would your parents feel if you used the word "frindle" and had to stay after school for detention?
3. You are Mrs. Granger. Write the letter which was in the fat white envelope that Nick had signed.

(4) Frindle Questions Chapters 9-10:

1. How would your parent's react if you were Nick and the principal came to your house?
2. Would you continue to use the word "frindle"? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
3. Who do you think sent Judy Morgan the class picture? Explain your answer.

(5) Frindle Questions Chapters 11-12:

1. Do you think Bud and Mr. Allen's deal is fair? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
2. If you were Nick's dad, would you keep the money a secret from Nick? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
3. You are Nick. What would you do with the first cheque you got from Bud Lawrence?

(6) Frindle Questions Chapters 13-15:

1. You are Mrs. Granger. Write a thank you note to Nick for his gift.
2. Did you like the ending of the book? Tell why or why not. Explain your answer.
3. You have made up a new word. What is the word and what does your word mean? Why would others use it?

Appendix (continued)

Discussion questions for before you read the chapter.

Chapter 1

Some students delight in coming up with creative ways of making the school day more interesting. Tell about an incident in which one of your fellow students came up with such an idea.

List four personal qualities that you feel make for a really great teacher.

Chapter 2

The author of *Frindle* uses exaggeration very effectively in making his story more interesting (e.g. “those huge dictionaries with every word in the universe”). Give your own example of exaggeration in describing an animal of your choice.

Nick's fifth grade teacher takes words and their meanings very seriously. Explain why she might think such things are important.

Chapters 3 & 4

Are you familiar with any strategies designed to distract a teacher and waste time in the classroom? Describe one such strategy that might be successful in accomplishing this goal.

Chapter 5

Think about a time when you had to stand up in front of several people for a particular reason (to do a report or display a talent). Describe your feelings. Why do you think you felt this way?

Chapters 6 & 7

Men and women have been coming up with creative ideas for thousands of years. Describe one particularly imaginative idea that proved to be important to people everywhere. Who was responsible for that idea?

Chapter 8

Tell about a time when you (or a friend) were unfairly punished. Be sure to describe what happened and how you felt.

Chapter 9

Tell why a principal might visit the home of one of his/her students. Try to come up with 2 possible reasons.

Chapter 10

If you were a reporter investigating the *frindle* controversy, think of one question you might ask the following people: Mrs. Granger, Nick, Mrs. Chatham and Nick's mom.

Chapter 11

Although telling the truth is an excellent idea, it can sometimes create difficulties as well. Give an example of how this might be true (use your own experience if you like).

Chapter 12

What is meant by the term "get rich quick scheme"? Give a possible example of such a scheme.

What advantage might there be in being rich? What disadvantage might there be in being rich?

Chapter 13

Describe one advantage to being famous. Describe one disadvantage.

Chapter 14

Describe the greatest idea you have ever had. (If you can't think of one, use your imagination.)

Tell about a time when an adult (other than one of your parents) said something encouraging to you that made a real difference in your life.

Chapter 15

What does the word generous mean to you? Give an example of generosity from your own life.

What do you think is in the envelope that Mrs. Granger gave to Nick? (Be as detailed as possible)