Struggling against pedagogical instrumentality: Attempting to awaken the literary imagination in Singapore's secondary English classrooms

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Abstract

Building Communities of Readers among Teachers (BCR) project attempted to employ a teachers-as-readers professional development framework to build participating Singaporean secondary English teachers' capacities to teach literature. Teachers-as-readers projects are designed to promote teachers' personal engagement with narrative as a prelude to reconceptualizing English their teaching, leading them to afford students with greater opportunities to explore literary texts in depth through extended talk, writing and other forms of representation. This paper elaborates the interrelated structural and attitudinal reasons why this framework had to be abandoned in favour of more a recognizable form of professional development in order to garner sufficient teacher support to work towards the projects' goals. Singapore's legacy of a pragmatic and technicist orientation to education hinders the adoption of such a reflexive form of professional learning.

Since independence (1965), pedagogical instrumentality has provided Singapore's students with a strong foundation in English language competencies (Luke, 2005). Wee notes, that, in terms of its language policy, Singapore's emphasis on economic development "treats English language proficiency as necessary for attracting foreign investment and providing access to scientific and technological know-how" (Wee, 2003, p. 214). Economic instrumentalism with regard to language policy in Singapore historically has lead to justifications of a pragmatic orientation to pedagogy. Instrumentalism oriented language and literacy as commodities and resources. Instrumentalism led to monologic, highly scripted, constrained, superficially procedural, and didactic teaching, which favoured those Singaporean students who faithfully reproduced predictable textual responses and constructions. Until recently, there was little opportunity in the majority of Singaporean English language and literature classrooms to explore the full meaning potential of texts (Kramer-Dahl, 2008).

English is the language of instruction in all but the mother-tongue classes (Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) in Singapore. The Ministry of Education's (MOE) recent policy shifts focus on providing greater opportunities for students to engage meaningfully with a wide range of texts. For example, in recent years, the government has made progress in providing more English language pre-primary education (84%). The number of households that use English (42% in 2005) has steadily increased. One of the key aims of the current English Language Syllabus is to promote language for literary response and expression (MOE, 2007).

Contextualised within these policy initiatives, the pedagogical intervention project, described below, attempted to run counter to the powerful legacy of instrumentalist educational discourse in Singapore. With modernization and globalization, the national and institutional contexts for Singaporean education have changed. The MOE's recent policies support cognitively richer and more meaningful student outcomes that recognize likely 21st century economic and social requirement. Elsewhere, we note that the operationalizing of policies to create a new critical and creative future workforce have reflected the persistence of this instrumentalist legacy (Kwek, Albright, & Kramer-Dahl, 2007)

Not surprisingly, given these new and ambitious policy commitments:

Singapore's education system is characterized by gaps between its current practices and its aspirations (particularly with respect to the cognitive depth of teaching and learning in Singapore's classrooms). …Overall, however, it is a system with substantial achievements, high aspirations, significant institutional resources and capacities, and considerable challenges. (Hogan et al, 2008)

The *Building Communities of Readers among Teachers* (BCR) project was an intervention into teachers' personal and pedagogical reading practices based on a narratological and intertextual understanding of textual response in secondary English education. This research-based, two-year project tried to connect teachers' rich textual engagements with those they provide their students. Its aim was so facilitate the creative and critical possibilities that textual openness can bring to classroom practice and learning.

The Legacy of Pedagogical Instrumentality

The development of Singapore's education system and its underlying ideology affects the profile of teaching in general and English teaching in particular. Building teacher capacity in content and pedagogical knowledge was this project's focus.

Singapore is a compact, highly urbanized, nation-state in Southeast Asia with a population—just over 4.5 million—comprised of ethnically diverse, multilingual, and multireligious citizens. 75% of the population Chinese, followed by Malay (15%), Indian (7%) and others (3%), the country's official languages include Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil. English is the dominant language of administration, business and education. Singapore became an independent state in 1965, governed by the democratically elected People's Action Party, with Lee Kuan Yew as the chief architect of the nation. The lack of any strong opposition in government has meant that nation-building policies, including educational, were often implemented top-down, efficiently, and effectively. Given Singapore's geographical location (surrounded by Muslim states) and its history (occupied by Japanese forces during the World War II), the country was, and will always be, vulnerable politically and economically. With no natural resources, Singapore is entirely dependent on its human resources to survive and succeed. Education quickly became a main policy focus with continual commitment and significant investment since independence. As Lee and his government began to realise their nation-building project, bringing Singapore from a third world developing nation to a first world cosmopolitan city state, education played several key roles: it spearheaded economic development; it was the quintessential tool for social engineering; it built social coherence amidst diversity; and it facilitated a meritocratic ideology (Chua, 1997). The pragmatic orientation of educational policies meant that economic considerations often, and quite overtly, drove educational reforms. For example, the bias in education towards the scientific, technical and business disciplines over the arts and humanities is evident in former Minister of Education, Teo Chee Hean's, proclamation that the former disciplines, "fuel economic growth and allow a country to gain a competitive edge" and prepare students with the "knowledge, skills and mindset to thrive in a technology driven and rapidly changing future" (Teo, 2002).

Concern for meeting the demands on the new knowledge-based economy and globalisation prompted the government to implement a number of wide-ranging and systemic educational reforms intended to create students who are creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, and independent learners. The *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (TSLN) reform in 1997 was the major response to a need to create a nation of 'knowledge workers' (Tan & Gopinathan, 2000). A market model drove innovative school practices, whereby competitiveness was encouraged through national school rankings and greater school autonomy (Tan, 1998). Nevertheless, the government's control over the school curriculum, the pressures imposed by national examinations at the end of 6th, 10th and 12th years of schooling, accountability of school performances, led to the risk-averse practices of not deviating from the mainstream curriculum. In a culture of school league tables, teachers were more inclined to persuade students to drop subjects they deemed to be 'difficult to score in': "Subjects such as Literature, Art and Music, …have been sidelined in the curriculum of [the] schools since it is harder to predict student examination performance in these subjects" (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002, 157).

This technicist vision influenced curriculum design and teacher education in Singapore. Deng (2004) argues that teacher preparation programmes—and one may add in-service programmes—in Singapore are largely oriented towards equipping teachers with technical and practical skills and techniques required to be competent in classrooms. Such training systematically marginalizes the "educative" role of teacher development, which takes

on the task of transforming teacher beliefs and perspectives. "Education opens people to the 'power of possibility'; it empowers them to think about what they are doing, to make sense of their lived worlds, and to perceive different alternatives" (Deng, 2004, 164). In the context of English language teaching, such limitations in teacher training inevitably construed particular kinds of pedagogy that created a strong foundation in basic language competencies but failed to provide students with the critical and creative repertoires needed for the 'new communicative order' (Street, 1999b).

Findings from recent studies, both large-scale and case-based, in Singaporean classroom pedagogy and curriculum recontextualisation, described in the following section formed the basis of our intervention.

Research Findings on English Language Teaching

The Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP), an educational research centre based in Singapore, conducted an empirical, large-scale, comprehensive baseline analysis of what constitutes pedagogical practices in Singapore schools (Luke et al, 2005). Quantitative and qualitative in nature, the Core project draws on research designs from the Wisconsin Centre on Organisation and Restructuring of Schools studies (Newmann and Associates, 1996), the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard et al, 2002), and the Productive Pedagogy framework from New South Wales (Gore et al, 2001). It explicitly focused on the everyday practices, the intellectual and discourse work, of Singaporean classroom teachers and students. With over 200 of Singapore's 320 schools participating in the Core project and covering the major curriculum areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Mother Tongue across primary and secondary school levels, the findings are representative.

The Core project research yielded a number of broad findings relevant to English teaching in Singapore (Luke, 2005). The dominant pedagogy at work in Singaporean classrooms was that of direct instruction, with most teachers being unable to deviate from the 'curricular script' to broader discussions and engagement over broader disciplinary knowledge, prior experiences, and knowledge about the world. CRPP's research found that curriculum content dominated the classroom, with little opportunity for sustained debate, exposition or extended discussions around texts. Driven by a strong focus on the national examinations, teachers tended not to set intellectually rich or cognitively demanding tasks in classrooms, which in turn had consequences on the quality and depth of student-produced work. They also showed limited capacity to generate local, school-based curriculum that was developmentally coherent and responsive to students' needs. Importantly, most teachers seemed unable to 'weave' between the familiar and unfamiliar, that is, to make connections between not just different types of knowledge (such as: new-known, scientific-everyday, literal-metaphor) but between different texts (Kwek et al, 2006).

More specifically, teacher whole-class lectures and Initiate-Response-Evaluate (IRE) answer checking dominated classroom activity. Groupwork, when it occurred (21% of the time, mean of 9.8% across all subjects), served as a regulatory device, or as a break from the routine teacher-student transmission of knowledge. The knowledge profile for Secondary school English likewise painted a picture of strongly classified subject teaching aimed at basic knowledge, itself often taken as unproblematic, with the expectation that students would reproduce what the teacher imparted. The curriculum was highly mono-disciplinary with little attempt to make English more intertextual. Teachers expected students to produce

answers or knowledge that confirmed what she knows or thought they should know, with little deviation.

Kramer-Dahl's research (2008), which examined literacy practices in Singapore secondary schools, corroborated these findings. She concluded that teachers are "the interpretative authority on the text for the students… [she] mediates the text to the students" (McDonald, 2004, 18). Teachers arbitrate textual meaning narrowly with clear predictable responses required by students that perpetuate single interpretations of any given text. English teaching was outcomes-driven with the faithful reproduction by students of a limited set of text-types rather than opportunities for the exploration of texts. Student work was often structured, mechanistic and formulaic. Kramer-Dahl's research indicated that instruction tended to focus on mechanical or procedural skills rather than on literacy or cognitive dimensions of the tasks. Importantly, the roles of readers and writers (much less multiple readings of texts) were often unacknowledged, with little to no reference to reading competencies such as the Four Resources Model of code breaking, meaning making, text use, and text analysis (Freebody & Luke, 2003). As Kramer-Dahl (2008) points out:

> …many secondary teachers operate with quite reductive notions of literacy, viewing its learning as a straightforward linear process rather than one of increasing functional differentiation. As they understand it, if their students come to lower secondary unable to make sense of the texts they encounter, it is the instruction in their early years which has failed and a return to, or continuation of, basic skills-focused teaching is the best response (5).

In a sense, Singapore's pedagogically instrumentalist legacy has similarities to literacy practices found in the United Kingdom, where the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) reform. Literacy becomes an autonomous mode (Street, 1999a) of "a set of technical skills, [atomised] components of language, [limited] textual practices to the linguistic mode, and [transforming] reading and writing into instrumental activities" (Street et al, forthcoming, 4). Ironically, unlike the NLS curriculum, Singapore's English language syllabus is structured to take into account "higher levels of literacy" and specialised competencies required for skilled participation at the secondary grade level. These include higher-level work with texts: resource-based and self-access learning, "evaluative" and "critical reading" (MOE 2001, 8) of outside materials from print to electronic sources, the understanding and production of more complex texts and genres, often in intense interdisciplinary project work (Kramer-Dahl et al, 2005). For example, one important component of the syllabus is the focus on language use for "literacy response and expression," which aims to prepare students to respond creatively and critically to literary texts, relate them to personal experiences and prior knowledge, culture and society, and use language creatively to express their selves and identities. But, when the syllabus was translated into classroom practice, it was done "through the layers of frequently idiosyncratic and localised 'mediation' and translation that are inevitable in top-down administered educational systems, such as textbooks, in-service programs, departmental unit plans and their own lesson plans" (Kramer-Dahl 2008, 6). The enacted curriculum employed a narrow range of textual forms and their organisational 'rules' which students are asked to reproduce.

The legacy of this narrowly recontextualised curriculum and the autonomous model of literacy led Luke (2005) to argue that there is a 'threshold' effect in Singapore pedagogy that has produced a powerful and sustainable foundation of basic skills and factual knowledge for the majority of students, evidenced by high scores on standardized

achievement outcomes and international benchmarks. However, the strong and systematic focus on explicit, direct and outcomes-driven pedagogy has unintentionally produced a ceiling on higher order, critical, creative knowledge and competencies. As Iannaccone commented almost twenty years ago:

> Legislated floors become ceilings; teaching to the test limits learning when only a narrow slice of the [language] domain is tested and definitions designed for testing precede the conceptualization of the domain and deter the developing reconceptualisations needed by an unknown future. (Iannaccone 1984, 684)

This threshold effect hypothesis is evident too in teacher preparation programmes that assume that teacher capacity building is a matter of imparting the newest methods, skills, and techniques to become competent teachers. Furthermore, given the heavy state focus on school accountability, the top-down mode of curriculum dissemination, the structural emphasis on assessments and outcomes, the rapid changes and reforms as educational systems struggle to adapt to global forces, and the often heavy teacher workloads as a result of all of these preceding factors, valued time for professional development, teacher reflection or upgrading of theoretical or subject knowledge, is hard to come by. The common practice of using professional workshops for acquiring new knowledge, competences and skills is nevertheless embedded within an instrumental orientation and, more often than not, presents teacher learning as "a patchwork of opportunities—formal and informal, mandatory and voluntary, serendipitous and planned—stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent 'curriculum'" (Wilson and Berne 1999, 174).

Consequently, if literacy in its most basic sense is about having access to the practices involved in the making and remaking of textual meaning (about being able to read and write), and if daily classroom interactions around texts play a major role in the shaping of what constitutes knowledge and competence for students (Freebody, Luke and Gilbert 1991), then, the limited pedagogical capacity of English teachers and the threshold effect work together to create a form of "trained incapacity" (Bernstein 2001, 163) to engage in imaginative textual practices. In the BCR project, teachers had little capacity for textual play because not only had they limited experience in looking beyond the singular, authoritative meaning of a text, they had come to accept as natural and therefore naturalized through their own practices, particular and highly unidimensional versions of literacy, writing, literary response and reading.

How we envisioned the BCR project

Luke (2005, 1) defined interventions as "systematic, structured attempts to generate desired or preferred change in the core business of curriculum, teaching and learning and thereby to shift patterns of educational outcomes and effects". The preceding sections alluded to some of the changes required: a shift to a more social, cultural and intertextual understanding of textual play through reading practices; an attempt to break through the ceiling of the threshold effect in terms of teacher capacity; and to denaturalise the trained incapacity and engage teachers in textual interpretation. Accordingly, the BCR project design comprised of two stages scheduled over a period of two years, with a strong research focus on building teachers' capacities that focused on improving the repertoires of reading in the first stage, and improving students' outcomes in the second. The premise in the latter stage was that, just as teachers improve on becoming readers; their increased exposure to the world of

textuality would encourage a subsequent exposure to more texts and readings for their students, so that they will be more open to possibilities for textual play and construction. Hence, rather than being packaged as a conventional dissemination project, our professional development sessions would allow for teacher learning, especially about the enactment of instruction that may facilitate creative, intertextually rich engagement with texts, to be activated such that they could themselves experience "the struggle of an active engagement with … texts, the interweaving of lived and felt experience with canonical forms" – experiences which, as Hicks (1997, 482) has argued above, are critical if teachers want to afford their students similar learning experiences.

Central to the project was a series of reading circles for teachers which provides not only the context for building their capacities but a professional environment and structure, one which opens opportunities "to represent and to analyse the diversity of personal readings within a safe and intellectually supportive context" (Sumara et al, 2006, 65). The circles were built on themes found in successful professional development endeavours, such as explicitly building a community of learners with a focus on redefining teaching practice; helping teachers to understand their own knowledge and transforming it; and the development of 'critical colleagueship' (Wilson and Berne, 1999).

The project's overall aims were ambitious but the task of denaturalizing teacher practices necessitates the hard work:

1. To improve teachers' understanding of textuality and textual interpretation and explication.
2. To develop teachers' capacity to design curriculum and pedagogy with special focus on textuality and student response.
3. To improve student performance and engagement as a consequence of teachers' improving textual capacity.
4. To promote teachers' collaboration to sustain ongoing professional growth in curriculum design and assessment.

We framed the project around the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' capacities for curriculum design and pedagogy with respect to reading and textual practices?
2. What are the discourses about textual interpretation and explication that occur in classrooms and reading circles?
3. How do teachers handle diversity of opinion and multiple readings in classrooms and reading circles? How do they encourage pluralism and manage disagreements in respectful ways?
4. What are the changes that occur in classroom practices as teachers change and build up their repertoires of reading?
5. What are the changes that occur in both the ways teachers talk about texts and read texts as they build up their repertoires of reading?
6. How do student performance and engagement change as a consequence of teachers' improving textual capacity in their personal and professional reading practices?

Singapore streams secondary students based on their performance on the Primary 6 high-stakes Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE). The majority of these 12 and 13 year olds are slotted into the Express, who score higher, 4-year course, or the Normal, 5-year course.

Normal pupils are further streamed into the Normal Academic (NA) course or the Normal Technical (NT) course. Express students take the 'O' level high stakes examination at the end of the 4th year and Normal students take 'N' level examination at the end of the 4th year. Those who meet the criteria go on for a 5th year of study for the opportunity to take their 'O' levels. Express students typically proceed to the junior colleges, polytechnics or technical institutes. An alternative for pupils who do not make 'O' levels or are in the NT course is to do technical and vocational education at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

Two low to middle-ranked secondary schools, with 26 teachers from the Lower Secondary level for English language and Literature, participated. One school has been in existence since 1938 but had recently relocated in a newly developed public housing town area. It has Normal, Normal Technical and Express streams and employs a Home Room system, which they use as "Learning Centres". Each teacher owns a classroom, with students moving to the Homerooms for lessons instead. This single sex, religiously affiliated, girls' school was ranked in Band 3 (of 4) in National League tables 2006. In this school, the teachers followed the textbook, teaching guide and school syllabus closely. There was little deviation from the textbook except for the use of a weekly newspaper and 6 Comprehension/Composition Test Preps per year that were usually not connected to the English syllabus either in theme or content. As is common in Singapore, this school divided English education into language and literature classes. The literature classes seldom deviated from the text on hand. The other school, set up in 1974, was comprised of Express and Normal streams, having three Express classes and five Normal classes per level. This government school described itself as having a disciplined and pupil-focused school environment that emphasises values, character development, innovation and enterprise. It was ranked in Band 3 (of 4) in National League tables 2006. Staff turnover was high. All English teachers were required to teach across all levels due to work force demands. Out of 10 original teachers in the project, only three remained by the end of 2nd year. Language Arts Programme. Unlike the girls' school, the faculty had implemented a lower secondary language arts programme in 2005. In anticipation of the 'O' and 'N' level high stakes exams in Year 4 and 5, the senior secondary English curriculum had not changed. These 4 to 6 week teacher designed modules focused on such themes as poetry and drama, journalism, narrative, natural disasters, crime scene investigation. Some were multidisciplinary, infusing history, geography, science and literature.

We conducted the research for this innovation project in two stages over two years. We did, in stage one-classroom observations of units of work in English and Literature with a focus on the enacted curriculum and teachers' uses of texts. Ethnographic fieldnotes captured lesson activity structures (Cole and Engestrom, 1993), teacher-student interactions, texts or textual resources, and intertextual connections that the teacher might have made in class (Bloome and Egan-Robertson 2004). Furthermore, we conducted semi-structured interviews with regard to the teachers' beliefs about their own capacities and confidence in the subject matter, knowledge about language and literacy pedagogy, their textual practices and reading histories, reasons for selecting their present texts, beliefs about students' reading practices, and views about effective classroom strategies. The objective was to use this information for the second phase to get the teachers to examine the relationship between their knowledge and beliefs about literacy teaching, and their pedagogical practices (Anstey and Bull, 2003). We provided self-reflection questionnaires around a key lesson observed, along with its transcript and audio recording to teachers to obtain specific information about the pedagogy of the lesson. We planned to use these 'telling moments' in later workshops to

promote critical analysis and reflection. This we felt would position teachers as active participants and collaborators in the project, and encourage them to analyse reflectively their own practice They would be encouraged to share their own data with colleagues, and work with researchers towards problematising hidden assumptions and improving some of their practices. Providing a collaborative and supportive environment via reading circles, with the aim of building a teacher community of readers and increasing teacher capacities for textual practices, we thought would be crucial to the success of the project.

We suggested literary texts for the reading circles based on a number of factors: (1) teachers' own reading habits; (2) texts that can provide rich intertextual connections to teachers' own lives and to each other; (3) texts that potentially provoke multi-layered, multi-perspective readings. The circles read a mix of short fiction and extended narratives, with a bias towards local or regional authors. We asked the teachers to read the texts and meet biweekly for two and half hours in the school as a group to discuss what they have read. The reading circles we hoped would provide teachers with a shared metalanguage to talk about language/texts/ genre/multiple perspectives and to talk about their pedagogical practices. Working together, our goal was to have teachers see that their engagement with these texts was enriched by sharing multiple and varied interpretations.

Valuing polysemic responses to shared texts requires readers to understand and appreciate difference and be able to navigate respectfully the potential conflicts that arise when multiple readings are encouraged. Such pedagogy promotes movement from a denial of difference to understanding and encouraging a productive use of difference, which shifts teachers' work from managing backstage conflict to mainstaging the negotiation of conflicting issues (Goffman, 1959). Negotiating these tensions depends on developing a community of readers. Teachers must move past seeing divergent views as antagonistic to accept these tensions within the group, and importantly, to recognise that teacher and student learning are fundamentally intertwined.

Throughout the reading circles, we hoped that critical analysis of transcripts of the reading discussions would be ongoing by researchers and participants. The circles challenged metacognitively the teachers to reflect back on what is going on in the circle, their underlying assumptions about their social, cultural, educational and pedagogical beliefs, and productively discuss ways forward. We invited the teachers to collaborate and work with one another through methods such as interviewing one another and observing their own practices.

We anticipated that as the intervention project shifted into the second stage (second year), teachers would be asked to do initial action-research projects to determine their own students' literacy practices. Using literacy logs, teachers would encourage students to track their own literacy histories and view literacy as not just text-based or book-based (Albright et al 2005). Reading materials would slowly shift towards particular texts that have relevance to their teaching, with discussions held to translate the knowledge gained from the reading circles into their classroom practices. In this second stage, research would focus on teachers' employment of knowledge and practices developed in the first stage of the project. The focus will be on how they may go about planning units, lessons, and activities that encourage their students to respond reflectively, and analytically—but also divergently—to literary and non-literary texts, both canonical and multicultural.

However, it became difficult to maintain the project design fidelity. The BCR project changed because the original design would have had little chance of success. It had to engage the logic of teachers' practice on their own terms. We abandoned the teachers-as-readers

framework we had adopted in favour of a more recognizable form of professional development in order to garner sufficient teacher support for the project's overarching goals.

Why the BCR project changed

Initial classroom observations showed that the pedagogical profile for the teachers in these two schools strongly corroborated CRPP's Core findings (Hogan, et al, 2006). The following patterns common across all teachers were observed: low expectations of their students' reading practices despite knowing little about what they actually read; deficit discourses which drive their teaching practices and beliefs about their own students; teachers having limited reading habits themselves and when they do read, texts chosen for functional rather than recreational purposes; and teachers finding their heavy workload impinging on their ability to read outside of their teaching needs. Despite these obstacles, the teachers believed that reading is crucial in improving their students' English language competency. They recognized that their reading curriculum and classroom interactions should connect with their students' out-of-school textual experiences and practices.

We have come to understand that there were three interrelated stories why it became important to change the design of the BCR project. The project changed over a period and was the result of our ongoing attempts to accommodate our work to the teachers' frame of understanding and willingness to engage in professional development in a responsible and effective manner. We see a curriculum, professional development, and disciplinary story in what happened in our project.

The Curriculum Story

Macro and micro contexts within which teachers work shape their identities and beliefs. In particular, they affect what they believe about their students and their agency for *delivering* the curriculum. Until quite recently, Singapore's highly elaborated secondary English curriculum did not encourage classroom teachers' involvement in instructional planning, located chiefly within the MOE's remit. Teachers in both schools were used to a packed, highly scripted functional curriculum that lacked internal cohesiveness. Units were so modular as to be interchangeable. In some cases, teachers did not enacted curriculum in units at all. Their pedagogy was comprised of highly 'molecularized' lessons (Cazden, 1992). There was no progression over the course of a semester or year for building student understanding, knowledge and skills. Moreover, there were only moderate attempts to make the curriculum differentiated, developmentally appropriate, or authentic.

We found that many of teachers in this project adopted either a compliant or an accommodating posture to the official curriculum in their schools. A few were more resistant. Compliant teachers did not question the existing curriculum. Sometimes more experienced teachers and some younger teachers made an effort to reconcile their personal beliefs about teaching and students with the curriculum. Our observations show that accommodating teachers were able to deviate strategically in total compliance with the mandated curriculum. A small number of teachers taught a substantively different curriculum from that proscribed.

The English Head of Department (HOD) in one school, a young woman with over 7 years of experience who read management self-help books as recreational reading and who had spearheaded her department's adoption of the language arts programme, exemplified a very compliant stance. She believed that language was a "tool" and "not a subject to be learnt." Her teaching and leadership promoted the belief that teachers should give students clear, unambiguous texts to read and that assessments should not assess interpretive skills beyond the simplest of inferencing. For example, in a lesson preparing students to sit for upcoming common exam she advised:

> That's why you have to read carefully. It's either this or that. It's never unclear. It's never unclear. When we set the question ah when teacher set the question I will ask the teacher actually. I will look through the papers. Okay. All exam papers come through me.

Further, when in the reading circle we read "A Story of an Hour" (Chopin, 1894), she counseled against using this highly anthologized short story because:

> As an institution in the school, our selection of texts is very important. And as far as the text go, we go with universal values that we promote. Certain values whereby it depends on certain marriages certain cultures, we try not to venture into those areas because it's.. well, we represent a certain institution and I think we have to be very careful about the selection of texts. So universal values, yes.

Clearly, for this teacher, texts were both vehicles for teaching straightforward comprehension and prescriptive morality.

Her beliefs are reinforced by deficit assumptions about students' capacity to deal with textual and conceptual complexity. Speaking about the texts she selects for her class she stated:

> Our kids are not very sensitive to the subtle changes, styles, hints that are laid by the author and there are many hints along the way to lead to the final conclusion… Stories with twists especially. I learned this when designing the narrative module and inserted stories with twists. Even express students were lost. They couldn't understand after explaining this part and this part is actually the author's way of paving to that twist. If you go back to look at it again no matter how many times you showed it to them they do not see it. That's the reason I would not choose this text because that hint might not be very obvious to the kids. Even when it's very obvious there will be still some kids who simply cannot see it.

A Senior Teacher with 40 years teaching experience exemplifies the minority of teachers in the BCR project who adapted the official curriculum as they saw fit. A holder of a Royal Society of Arts EFL Diploma with a diverse personal reading habit, her deficit assumptions about students' capacities led to somewhat differing conclusion about the enacted curriculum:

> You have to lure/seduce them to the books and to reading. When the American [n]egro doctor was here for the operation of the twins, I told them about his story. How his mother, despite being uneducated, made her children read and write book

reviews. He heads the pediatric unit at John Hopkins and his brother is a famous scientist now. They came from broken family, poor, house full of rats. I read all these to them. Most of my students are also from very disadvantaged families.

Her experience enables her to be critical of the school's official curriculum. She observed, "Tasks are now dictated by the module but every now and then I slip in certain work to perk them up. Raise their self-esteem and having fun". Nevertheless, she shared the belief that texts are to be valued for what their morally edifying worth. For example, she related this story from one of her classes:

> There's a boy in my class who is very calculative. When I asked him to do certain work, he would ask "Teacher, how much?" So I played the song about the boy who asked how much his mother would pay him for taking out the trash. The song is called "No Charge". "For the nine months I carried you, no charge…" Everybody pointed at him and he learnt his lesson. I guess it's the experience. I know how to brainwash them and lure them into whatever path I want.

Eschewing worksheets and willing to replace the official curriculum with texts he felt resonated better with his students, a young teacher with only 4 years experience exemplifies the few teachers in the project who resist the official school curriculum. He had left his former school because it wanted to explicitly focus on raising its profile through exam prep. Reflecting on his teaching, he states:

> I would want them to learn some basic skills--that there are some reasons why they are in school. There is this girl who was in school for a few days this term and then is gone and un-contactable again. The class worried about her absence and I use it as an opportunity to talk about the decision-making and how they can be careful about the choices they make. I hope they'll have enough of these skills to keep them in school because from what I've seen, the dropout rate increases as they get older and as their problems get bigger. Their studies are the least of my worries because I know many are not going to make it, or move on to O' levels. But if they have some values like honesty, are willing to work hard and know that they have responsibilities, at least it's less worrisome when they leave school.

And

> I hope that they will at least enjoy the subject. I used to be weak in Maths and because I was weak in it, I didn't like the subject since I didn't know what to do with it. I hope that even if they are weak and do not know the answers, they are allowed to say what they think and feel is right. At least they'll have a more positive impression of the subject and they don't end up hating the subject to the point that they don't learn anything for the rest of the four years. Even if it's small steps and slow progress…

Unfortunately, his colleagues and HOD did not view his teaching positively.

The Professional Development Story

Teachers in this project reported that conventional professional development (PD) 'delivered' in workshops and lacking in coherence and continuity was disconnected from contingencies of their schools and classrooms. The history of PD in Singapore as elsewhere

is of a diet of 'one-shot' tips for teaching—updating teachers through ready-made packages, rather than providing opportunities for sustained learning about curriculum, pedagogy and students. Teachers in the BCR project characterized PD as, "Courses on setting exam papers, updates on how ministry is changing the way things are assessed... Course for pre-schoolers–applicable for NT students. Phonetics etc to teach reading... I just attended a rubrics course in MOE. It was very short and was for project work coordinators... How to teach comprehension for 'O' level students organised by the National Library".

The legacy of past PD positioned teachers as recipients of knowledge about 'research', 'best practices', 'teaching techniques', rather than people who own and control their professional development. The BCR project attempted to realise a vision of school reform where schools changed into places where all students learn with understanding and are able to accomplish intellectually rigorous academic work. This required teachers to have a broad conceptual and pedagogical framework for reflecting critically on their current practice (Ball & Cohen, 2000).

We needed to redesign the BCR project because our teachers' educational history in many cases did not provide the rich experiences needed to teach within approaches grounded in views of reading as multidimensional. While we attempted to create experiences, where teachers could engage in learning that would parallel the innovative ways of teaching and learning reading (Florio-Ruane, Raphael, McVee & Wallace, 1997). We realized that what was needed was PD that was more "strategic" documentation of teachers' own practices through collectively co-constructing curriculum materials and schemes of work, students' work within a sound theoretical base to develop ways to study, analyse and adapt teaching and learning (Ball & Cohen, 2000, Wilson & Berne, 1999).

The challenge we confronted was that teachers had their own 'cultural models' of what kind of knowledge is most helpful, often of instrumentalist and pragmatic. For example, one teacher, reflecting on the initial writing circles that:

> My initial expectation of the session is to gain techniques and skills directly applicable to my teaching. That was why I was a little lost when we were asked to reflect on our reading instead of teaching. However, as the sessions unfold, I can see how the various activities help us to think about our own teaching and how we can carry out similar activities in our classroom.

Rarely did these teachers come to professional development assuming that their perspectives on knowledge, curriculum subject, or students were in need of reflection and possible change:

> My initial expectations are: to customize and make teachers understand the importance and benefits of reading/ comprehension, to teach teachers to teach reading to students, to engage them, to interest them. Some have been met, e.g. reading out of interest, free-will, sharing of thoughts amongst the teachers on the readings.

And,
> I am surprised that it requires a lot more work. The reading and discussions reminded me how challenging the activity, reading, was for me. A lot of time I was so caught up with work that I teach the same way as I did".

And,
> I expected it to be something centred around working with students on reading

skills.

While there was some fidelity to the spirit of what we originally set out to do, we had to make serious compromises in the BCR project's design. Over the first phase, our conversations shifted from teachers as readers to reflecting on classroom practice, materials to use in their classrooms, exams and examiners responses, policy documents, to curriculum planning. Shifting to teachers' attention to planning entailed a moving them from their conventional focus on individual stand alone lessons and units to focusing on larger reconceptualizing work around the issues of learning and goals for teaching. Even then, we had to strike a careful balance, at the risk of the teachers' possible alienation, between practical outcomes as the teachers saw them and our project's goals.

The Disciplinary Story

English teaching disciplinarily provides students with access to content knowledge—key concepts and their relationships, shared meanings, understandings and practical reason. English teachers also provide disciplinary procedural knowledge. Their pedagogical content knowledge, how to generate content and procedural knowledge new to students, is crucial for successful learning. This work is usually accomplished through rich conversations focused on texts (not just print texts), which discuss, assess, and validate knowledge claims, and through facilitating extended text production. Much of English teachers' work entails weaving back and forth between different kinds of knowledge (factual, procedural, and conceptual) and focuses on the cultivation of appropriate epistemic dispositions (e.g. skepticism, critical inquiry, truth seeking, etc).

   Educationalist have often charged subject English with the responsibility for creating and maintaining literacy in society. It can be viewed public space wherein 'literate' subjectivities and social, cultural and economic benefits are (re)produced and shares a history with schools as state sponsored institutions (Green 1995; Green and Beavis, 1996). Historically, it has had a central focus for the moral training of children (Hunter 1994a, Hunter 1994b). Competing discourses contest and position themselves within subject English over the worth of particular literate practices, for particular benefits: rote recitation and discipline replaced by scientific skill transmission; growth models dominate some educational sites since the 1960's; more recently, cultural studies, critical literacy and critically influenced rhetorical approaches to English language arts practices proposed and enacted in others (Luke, 1989).

   Subject English in Singapore reflects these competing traditions within the discipline. Yet, as we have argued, English teaching is constrained by the instrumentalist legacy. In the circles, teachers' pragmatic concerns regarding exams precluded disciplinary concerns about the goals of English education. For example, in the transcript below of one such session, teachers respond to the how the latest MOE syllabus did not change existing teaching practice:

   315. AK For those kids that have actually gone through the 2001 syllabus. They
   [MOE] showed the exams, the teachers were very disappointed. They [O Level
   English exam] have 2 comprehension instead of one and they're not comparing the
   texts. It's still the same thing! And they [Testing Agency] said we couldn't change too
   much otherwise the parents will be upset because they changed and teachers will

have to change their way of teaching they couldn't function, poor things they have to teach for the exam. That's usually what they say.

316. SC I'm frustrated as a teacher because I've been teaching since like.. and it's comprehension and composition and here I'm trying to get my students to pass and do well in composition and comprehension. But on the other hand I'm trying to think what is the relevance in their lives, if they're doing comprehension and composition and excelling in it. And here we're trying to get them to score in narrative but when they graduate from O levels, no one is going to be writing stories unless they're going to be writers themselves like Catherine Lim. So I should imagine that exposition is favoured like arguments and everything not essays like narrative. So I'm very confused.

…

326. SC Because they'll not become another Catherine Lim or somebody else and I'm teaching them Oh we must do this for narrative. Some of them are still trying to form a grammatical sentence.

327. AK We had the same yesterday. They were teaching them the Score. Then we said to someone about why not teach them argument, they go Oh no they can't do argument they don't know enough. We always advice them to do narrative.

328. SC Yes.

329. AK It says something.

330. SC I tell my students if they want to write an exposition an argument, they have to come and seek permission. They have to show me how well they can write, and they write one for me and if I see they can do it, then fine they can do it. I give all the help I can.

331. JA The other way is easier.

332. AK Here it's like show me how you can write a good narrative.

333. SC Okay but my students I ask them before, my band 1 students are you all more comfortable writing narrative or exposition, they all say narrative. They want to write narrative, it's their choice.

334. AK It's probably because it's drummed into them.

335. SC Yeah since Primary school!

336. Se When my children were students, they never chose narrative. My son and daughter they never chose narrative. Always choose exposition.

337. SC I did open up the option to them but in the end they want to write narrative. In fact when I asked them to write an argument for me they struggled. They don't know how to start an introduction. They ask me how do I start an introduction? They have no..

338. Se Because we do not teach them. We overemphasize the narrative.

339. Sh We didn't expose them enough.

340. Se YES.

341. Sh Because we're already thinking all they can do is narrative.

342. SC But I believe in teaching exposition and in class we do. But again they don't have the content knowledge, obviously.

Throughout these discussions, the teachers revealed how they employed texts largely as stable, straightforward vehicles for conveying authors' uniform uncomplicated meanings. Where these schools had developed unit syllabi, they were crammed with activities. The curriculum plans we collected had no coherent pedagogical development and seemed poorly

aligned with assessment. With a strong demand for accountability, most teachers focused on curriculum coverage.

Other instances in our circle discussion are illustrative of how these teachers tested rather than taught comprehension. We observed little of a principle and sustained approach to reading instruction.

The teachers had difficulty making substantial intertextual links to other texts, popular culture, students' lives, etc. Predominantly what links they made were to other lessons. It was only in the occasional class that teachers asked them to call on their prior knowledge or experience. In this transcript, the teachers in one school relate and example of how they try to provide their students with experiences with unfamiliar texts. They were frustrated with their students' response inside and outside the classroom to connect their students to the English curriculum:

307. J We try to give them experiences yeah, like bringing the kids to Blythe Spirit, a play and showing them Channelnews Asia clips and doing discussions..

308. JA What did they think of Blythe Spirit?

309. J They liked the Singlish parts I heard. They were able to understand the Singlish part, is that right?

310. CL They liked the ghost.

311. SC I think for Sec 3s we did one on computer games, cyber gaming before, 2003 or 2004.

312. CL Not the problems of cyber games. They are not concerned with that. Give them a passage on the counter strike and give them opinions.

313. AC But the girls won't understand.

314. SC But I feel that if we start with these things that they are familiar with right, because they need to know how to tackle texts that they are not familiar with..

315. AC What about animal texts? Animal texts are very safe.

316. J Surprisingly, when I mark this recent test the one I was telling you about on reading. The second one was a Readers' Digest recount of an incident regarding this special needs child you see, and I know Sally included it because she thought they could identify with it. But surprisingly the answers were of the same kind of quality. They didn't show more understand, they didn't show better understanding. They just…

…

329. SC …Actually when we brought them to watch Blythe Spirit, I'm not sure how many of them actually catch the witty..

…

331. SC Actually I enjoyed it.

332. CL I did tell the kids a lot of words they missed.

333. AC It's too fast for them.

334. Sh I went to the matinee and the kids laughed at the moments when the rest of the audience doesn't laugh. We laughed at things because they're ironic…

…

336. Sh Yeah.

337. SC So when we bring them for plays, drama, we're not sure how much they get out of it.

338. CL I think there's a lot of intrinsic… it's not just the language itself but it's the whole atmosphere.

…

340. CL I think that one is… the moment they step into the theatre they saw, not just step in, I mean at the entrance they see all the adults they dressed up, they were already in

awe. Jaw drop.

Structuralist and pastoral perspectives to English teaching dominated these teachers' classroom practices. Lessons as illustrated in this example of a student presentation focus on stable text-types. They did not frame genres as contingent and contextual social practices:

1 S: Hi everybody. I'm Suhan and this is Jessica. Kay and um we are going to introduce this movie called Nanny McPhee.
2 J: Er: introduction (XXXX) the characters are Nanny McPhee Simon Tora Eric Sebastian Aga=Agatha Mr Brown Evangeline Lily and (XXXX).
3 S: The introduction is that Mr Brown has seven children who are very clever but are very very naughty. And they got rid of seventeen nannies before Mr Brown hired Nanny McPhee. So erm the complication of this story is that in this stage the children's great grandaunt Adelaide will stop giving the family allowance if Mr Brown doesn't marry a wife within the end of the month.
4 J: Sequence of events. Mr Brown married a woman to continue getting allowance.
5 S: Meanwhile er Nanny McPhee who appeared ugly had lots of warts on her face so and she also takes Sunday afternoons off and (XXXX)
6 J: Mr Brown has no choice but chooses Mrs Quickly who's evil and wants to take over. Ya that's the climax. Mr Brown has no choice but chooses Mrs Quickly who is evil wicked and wants to take over the head of the household.
7 S: When Mr Brown marries Mrs Quickly the children tried to get rid of her and got the maid instead.
8 J: Er Nanny McPhee became pretty and left the family as erm you have to understand the way she works. If you need her but don't want her she must stay but if you don't want her wait if you don't need her but want her then she must go. Okay this is the end of er this is the end of our presentation.
((Students clap.))
9 T: That's the resolution? Okay. Thank you Suhan and Jessica. You all are=all of you are very soft ah. What happened? Can you all please speak up louder? Nicole Alicia

For a significant and vocal number of the teachers, character education was an important goal of English teaching. This example is illustrative of the moralizing tone found in many of these teachers' classrooms:

5 T: Kay the book is "Taste Berries for Teens" just in case you want to buy the book or find the book in the library. "Taste Berries for Teens" (Young, B. & Young, J. 1999).
((Teacher writes title on whiteboard))
Kay I find that it's a very good book because its quite inspirational and it

teaches you a lot of things. On top of that you can learn English words from the passage. Vocabulary and improving your vocabulary and your ways of expressing yourself when you write your composition [sic]. Just a introduction. When we help others by sweetening lives joy and easing the bitterness of its disappointments and losses. By helping them see our world as full of hope less impossible and more glorious we become their taste berries. By the way the author is Betty B. Youngs.

((Teacher writes author's name on whiteboard))

B. Youngs. Betty be young. Which means you'll be young forever right.

6 Ss: No. /No./

7 T: /Kay./ The taste berry is a magical little red berry that mysteriously convinces our taste buds to experience all food. Do I need to repeat that? Ok I will repeat again. The taste berry is a magical little red berry that mysteriously convinces our taste buds to experience all foods. Even bitter ones. As sweet and delicious. Which means a taste berry is able to convince your taste bud to identify all foods as sweet and delicious even though some food may be bitter. Like like your life experiences sometimes might be bitter but think of it this way. Not every failure is a failure. But every failure is just that you've learnt a new lesson, you have learnt something new. Kay? People can and must be taste berries to each other. Make it your honor as much as your obligation to help support and encourage others. I'll repeat that again. People can and must be taste berries to each other. Make it your honor as much as your obligation to help support and encourage others. Doing this can sweeten the experience of their journey and bring meaning and purpose to yours. (3.0) The taste berry for the day is I will write it upon my heart to be a taste berry to others. Kay Can you make it a habit to be a taste berry to others:?

…

10 T: /That always count your/ blessings every morning and every morning as you look at yourself in the mirror tell yourself you can choose to be happy or sad. Can? Make sure that every morning you choose you make a choice. And the consequences would be in accordance to the choice you've make you can choose to be unhappy the whole day or you can choose to be happy. Kay? So for day two of taste berry is life is good. Be grateful. Especially when you are feeling bad or facing a tough time remember all the ways your life is good. Written by Paige Williams. Seventeen years old. He says that sometimes it is difficult to see the good in life when you are overwhelmed by stress struggling with a problem or have a broken heart. Especially at those times recall what is good and positive in your life. Doing this helps you feel that in spite of a hardship your faying facing. All in all your life is good and you are thriving and so you will vow to preservere through this challenge. You are grateful for all that is good and hope takes over. Hope makes it possible for your strength to be renewed. Your stamina to be restored. Your spirit to be lifted. And here's even better news. Gratitude is an attitude. And so the remote to tune it in and tune it up a notch is in your hands. Make it your desire to be grateful and all else will seem possible. So the taste berry promise for the day is I will tell my best friend 3 things for which I am grateful. Kay. Please talk to your neighbours

in fours or in pairs 3 things you're grateful for. Five minutes.
((Students begin to talk.))
You can be grateful for anything. You can be grateful for living in this world.
In this class. Grateful for your pet. Even grateful to your to have a friend
like your like Yingting.
((Students talk in background))

From our observations, there appeared to be great variation in the kind of English education students received across the four academic streams in each school and between the religiously affiliated school and the neighborhood school. In both schools, teachers felt that the study of literature was only for higher performing students. As we have indicated above, CRPP's research shows that few Singaporean students have had opportunities to do extensive writing and responding to texts in schools. Similarly, we observed that a student's access to high quality literary resources and a disciplinarily well-prepared English teacher varied significantly.

Conclusion

Our efforts to build teachers' narratological capacity to engaging students in substantively open-ended way with literary texts, holding back on pedagogical considerations until they had experienced the power of such elaborated discussions, floundered against the over-determining character of the legacy of pedagogical instrumentalism, evident in these teachers beliefs about the nature of their work and confirmed by the administrative and assessment contexts in which they work. We were unable to convince them that engaging with their personal literate practices and capacities could affect what and how they taught. The BCR project design had been informed by the general research consensus that, "[A] teacher's level of literacy… affects student achievement more than any other measurable teacher attribute" (National Council for Teacher Quality, 2004). The legacy of pedagogical instrumentalism blinkered these teachers from imagining teaching reading, writing and textuality, in general, in critical and artful ways. Even though they were concerned about pedagogy, their desire to teach well and successfully was narrowly construed. These teachers worked hard to improve students' basic, generic, comprehension and writing skills. In acceding to these teachers pragmatism, over time we refocused the reading circles on curriculum design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Our reconceived project goal became to shift teachers' attention from individual lessons to planning for student understanding, knowledge and skills. In this sense, we attempted to maintain some fidelity to what we originally set out to do, but we had to make serious compromises.

The case against pedagogical instrumentality

Singapore's aspiration as set out in its recent education policy settings contests against the legacy instrumentalist pedagogies, as evident in this study. Mission and Sumara (2006) argue that "given the centrality of language to human interaction and human thinking, developing creative capacities with language should be a fundamental underpinning of the creative economy" (2006, 1). Being able to make intertextual connections, which foregrounds the social, learned nature of reading and writing, is crucial in meeting this goal. Developing teachers' creative textual capacities can be achieved by having them interrogate their reading discourses and practices. This can become entry into denaturalizing the ways in which their

pedagogical practices work. As our findings showed, teachers often privilege "particular reading positions and practices from the many that are available or imaginable" (Freebody, Luke & Gilbert 1991, 445). In fact, the dominant reading practice in Singaporean classrooms has been such that what is to be extracted from the text (often the textbook), what is to be learned, is prespecifiable by the teacher and the text's author such that students learn a "singular way of reading a text properly" (Freebody, Luke & Gilbert, 1991, 442). This singular reading can be clearly demarcated, commodified, and verified through a set of comprehension exercises. Such a reading is often regulated by the teacher's privileging of particular cultural resources that students bring to bear, allowing only 'appropriate' resources to be used in textual meaning-making whilst discarding 'inappropriate' knowledge which might engender an alternative reading. Given the strong focus on assessment outcomes in Singapore, most teachers are afraid to deviate from the text, mindful that particular textual interpretations are preferred over others. School, after all, is about the acquisition of particular forms of knowledge that are culturally valued and privileged (Gilbert, 1994).

The task of denaturalising therefore begins with the realisation that a text has no singular, static and finite meaning; its meaning is dependent on who reads it, for what purpose and in what context. Singaporean teachers inherently know this, but in the frame of different contexts requiring different texts and readings, rather than one text opening up the possibility of multiple readings. As Gilbert (1987) points out, they know how to read texts in classrooms so that they become literary texts, and they know reading practices that allow them to read texts so that they become student texts. While they know how to assess texts and subsequently language competence, "it is the reading practices adopted in the reading of a text which designates its function – not the text itself, and certainly not the writer of the text. Texts become what they become because of the way they function in discourse" (Gilbert, 1987, 245). Such a perspective highlights the social context of a text – not only the intertextual web within which any text is a part of, but also how readers and writers of texts are inextricably intertwined. Importantly, when a text is "loosened from its authorized, legitimated meaning, the *conditions of possibility* for that authorized meaning become accessible for investigation" (Gilbert 2001, 79, our italics).

Reading then no longer becomes a fixed, personal, natural or innocent activity; it is not done in a social vacuum. Readers are always implicated in culturally determined discursive traditions, and these traditions determine the nature of reading and textual meaning. As such, the *repertoires of readings* – the reading practices that teachers have access to – allow them to make the range of textual meanings they are able to make. When teachers are naturalised into believing that textual meanings are fixed, determined, and singular, their repertoires of readings become narrow and limiting. Only when the authority of the text is interrogated, when a text is seen as a cultural construct that encourages and necessitates multiple readings, can reading become "an active opening out of a text's possibilities, rather than a passive closing in to one reading, one position of intelligibility" (Gilbert 1987: 247). Such a broadening of the repertoires of readings, to encourage a social and cultural form of textual creativity that allows for imaginative, multiple, intertextual readings and perspectives, is a central issue for us. Gilbert (2001) puts it succinctly:

> Reading can then be part of a real attempt to read the social: to make sense of the texts and signs of our culture. It becomes functional, connected, integrated. Once reading is freed of the shackles of locating a singular and authoritative textual meaning, it can instead focus on how meanings are made, and how different groups of people can make different readings, for different purposes. This will mean

recognizing both the positions that readers take up in relation to texts, and the discourses that are brought into play by different readers and different readings. It will mean focusing on the intertextual experiences of readers, and the intertextual connections between social texts (Gilbert, 2001, 81).

When reading practices are conceived not just as personal but social and culturally-mediated activities, when texts are continuously reworked, critically analysed and creatively appropriated from a social and cultural standpoint, only then can a deep and meaningful understanding be achieved in terms of the nature of textuality, the relationship between reading and textual practices, and how texts are intricately linked to the lived experiences of teachers and students. Key to this process is for Singaporean teachers to become aware of "the ways in which classrooms and their pedagogical practices work together as cultural technologies in the production of preferred discourses about reading and preferred reading positions for students" (Kramer-Dahl 1996, 259), to begin breaking through the metaphorical ceiling as it were. As Hicks (1997) argues:-

> The critical factor in moving towards this kind of literacy instruction would be teachers' biographies of engagement with literacy in this deeper, more generative sense. If classroom teachers have not themselves experienced the struggle of an active engagement with … texts, the interweaving of lived and felt experience with canonical form, it is probably going to be difficult for them to propel students towards these same kinds of experiences (1997:482)

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The article is devoted to the problem of improvement of professional training of bachelors in Russianlanguage on the basis of psychological and pedagogical features, which is topical nowadays.While training foreign bachelors it should be taken into account that the language and speech abilityis one of the mental functions of a person. It can develop like all others mental functions which is dueto innate instincts and human interaction with the environment and the process of studying, and itsdevelopment may last throughout life under favorable conditions which include, in our opinion, thedivers Rows are the typical environment for a teacher centered classroom and/or individual learning. Students are aligned in such a way so they all face the front of the class. The teacher conducts the instruction from this â€˜frontâ€™ position. This type of physical set-up is regarded by some as helping classroom management as the teacher can see all the students nearly all the time. The traditional classroom layout in rows allows the teacher to make eye-contact with all the students (although it is important to keep looking around to move beyond a narrow arc of vision, if you want everyone to feel incl