Report on **Redesigning Pedagogy Conference**
28 - 30 May 2007

The second Redesigning Pedagogy Conference at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and

Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore, was an eventful experience with educational

sharing from schools and tertiary institutions all over Singapore, Africa, Austria, Australia,

China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Brunei, Indonesia and other

countries. The theme for this biannual conference was *Culture, Knowledge and Understanding*.

With more than 40 workshops and 50 symposia (not to mention hundreds of papers presented

from schools, junior colleges, polytechnics and universities) to choose from, the conference

provided a unique experience for each participant.

The annual Ruth Wong (the first director of Singapore's Institute of Education) memorial

lecture was delivered by Prof. Elena Grigorenko (Yale) who, among other things, stressed that

creativity could and should be taught in the classrooms. By using software designed for

creativity analysis the validation of open ended essays in large scale quasi-experiment, the

quantitative experiment results indicated positive effects from teaching creativity in the

multiracial classrooms of American schools.

Sasha Barab (Indiana) presented interesting ideas to many participants in the

conference's third keynote address. He introduced the world of e-gaming as learning experience

in which students have the opportunities to play different but related roles in a game related to

geography lessons ranging from farmers to loggers. Each player could be wiped out with

accompanying holistic consequences. Students could remove loggers, in the game, but that

entailed closing down park, as there would be no more external financial support. This form of

education experience, offers e-problem-solving challenges to student thinking. Situated

cognition in the gaming experience, requires players to take either an outsider's perspective or an

insider role that could induce an overall implication with each decision made within a virtual world environment. Prof. Barab's address informed attendees that e-gaming has become a learning platform that challenges conventional learning experience with an ever-changing situational opportunity involving synchronous group decision making. The players were able to develop self-regulated behaviours and learn about what is and what is not appropriate (Barab and Jackson 2006).

Prof. Suresh Canagarajah presented the sixth keynote address to a full audience. He re-examined the concentric circles of Braj Kachru (1986) on the types of Englishes that spread around the world and proposed for a reordering of world Englishes. Prof. Canagarajah mentioned that globalisation has given rise to the saliency of norms of non-native English speakers; hence the core circle of purist English should become outer circles with the various types of English variations moving into the centre. His arguments were supported with examples of business negotiations between speakers of English from Switzerland and Finland. In the big stake negotiations, correctness in English usage paled in comparison to pragmatic strategies of communication between non-native speakers of English. He also cited the Spanish advertisement, *Si Buenos Aires*, at the New York subway that costs $10,000 a day. Instead of capitalising on English as the medium of communication, the business company capitalised on the rhyming of *Si* which means 'yes' in Spanish, and at the same time sound symbolic to *see,* in English, to attract the attention of a bigger crowd of polyglots. The global norms of communication put forth argue for a conflation of strategies in English communication that does not adhere to a purist stance in language performance.

Mogens Jensen (Georgia), with Dr. Alice Seng and Joseph Yeo (Singapore) discussed mediated learning experience. Dr Jensen urged the audience to think how they became who they

were. He debunked the notion that students could obtain direct learning experience without proper cultural mediation, normally afforded by parents and immediate family members. Thus learning has to be reinforced in a stimulus-response fashion through a mediator. When questioned on the fact of absent parents; and the possibility that chat room culture on the internet might influence and mediate latchkey children, Jensen somewhat agreed by acknowledging street kids in Los Angeles as relevant example.

Katina Zammit (University Western Sydney) shared how school and tertiary institutions engage in motivating disadvantaged students to learn through multimodal projects in New South Wales. She discussed the *Fair Go Project* that used many approaches in primary schools with a high percentage of immigrant students, including among others Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Anglo-Celtic, and Serbian. Her team tapped multiliteracies through the construction of e-magazines as a way to entice the students with authentic popular culture (see *School is for Me* 2006). The interest generated from the particular project was very encouraging as students stayed back late in school and came earlier to attend to the project. The form teachers in the school noticed that students stopped complaining about their lessons. The key point was to get the students to participate in the transformation of knowledge instead of remember facts. Dr Zammit reported that nothing was straight success, as there were discipline and learning problems from the boys and girls, but the students managed to see the value of learning at end of the day and interrupted the discourse of power, which otherwise would have the students trapped in a disadvantaged worldview.

It was a pity that the prominent speakers on corpus research in the conference were each given only 15 minutes. The speakers in this panel, Profs. Gu Yueguo (Beijing/Nottingham), Winnie Cheng (Hong Kong), Yukio Tono (Tokyo), and Huang Chu Ren (Taiwan), could have

used at least another hour of delivery time. All of them reported very interesting findings about corpus-based analysis in areas such as multimodal learning in China, textbook analyses in Hong Kong, television programme for English learning in Japan and Mandarin e-dictionary in Taiwan. Some of the research introduced by the panellists on blended learning and ICT pedagogy was original and informative.

Prof Gu, for example, did not have enough time to develop the notion of blended learning. His multimodal approach of tracking learners' learning experience in different segments of the day contained insights on learning behaviour of learners in and out of school. Prof. Huang's software, on the other hand, systematised a Mandarin corpus into a comprehensive tracking programme that offered the collocations of various terms. The corpus-based collations of words and phrases offered important insights on ways in which two particular terms of similar reference could be differentiated in distributions in relation to gender, cultural and political bias. The different usage of 'actor' and 'star' in Taiwanese Mandarin corpus were particularly telling, indicating that 'star' was associated with women whereas 'actor' was associated with men.

Interactive practitioners of mother tongue languages in Singapore presented different ways of delivering their second languages within an educational system based on English instruction. Ms. PG Tan from CHIJ St Joseph Convent shared on the use of music television videos (MTV) in the teaching and learning of Mandarin for secondary two students (14 year-olds). She made good use of lyrics from Mandarin language songs by popular music artists such as Jay Chou in comprehension exercise. The visuals from the videos provided clues in the interpretation of idioms and proverbs in Mandarin. The inference process of second language acquisition was enhanced with digitalised products from the entertainment world.

In another paper, JW Sew associated rehearsal in educational drama with learning in alignment, with the rehearsal mechanism in human working memory. The term *dramatics* was used to differentiate experiential ways of knowing by means of embodiment and relational position between learners from *dramatisation,* which referred to forms of performance for entertainment and competition (Sew 2007). It was pointed out that the visual schemas created in dramatics became a cognitive reference for composition for both mother tongue and pastoral lessons.

Keynote addresses reporting on macro research data were not necessarily relevant to interactive practitioners of education such as teachers unless practical knowledge and proper solutions for classroom practices were provided. Hence, it was not surprising that workshops providing strategies and know-how became popular sites for conference participants. Scholars from local schools showcased many research projects indicating a burgeoning interest in action research on classroom practices in Singapore. This conference was particularly important to practitioners of interactive learning classrooms, as it provided a platform for the learning voices and growing noises from the classrooms to be heard within the fraternity of teaching and learning.

The conference made available a valuable reflective opportunity for classroom practitioners, not so much to showcase what they could do, but rather what their students had achieved through the process of knowledge making.

References

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