QUESTIONING-THE-AUTHOR: PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

A small-scale study of reading comprehension in Primary 4 was undertaken. One aspect of the study was to introduce “Questioning-the-Author” (QtA) technique (Beck & McKeown, 2002) as part of reading comprehension lessons. Subsequently students answered comprehension questions which included ‘traditional’ reading comprehension questions (literal, inferential and applicative, following Ruddell, 1999) and QtA-type question (e.g. “What do you think the author wants you to understand?”). In addition to checking student comprehension via the lesson worksheets, we also administered a survey to gather information on student perceptions of item difficulty and interest level. In other words, which types of questions were perceived to be more difficult? Which questions were considered to be more interesting? This paper focuses on student perceptions of the different question types. We will also consider whether students’ perceptions of difficulty/interest matched accuracy of student responses.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss student perceptions of difficulty related to reading comprehension. In particular, we consider student perceptions of test item difficulty, reading passage difficulty, and reading passage interest level. Do student evaluations of passage interest align with their perceptions of ease of reading, or do students distinguish ease of reading and interest as two separate factors? When working through a reading comprehension worksheet, what types of questions are considered to be easier or more difficult? More or less interesting? Finally, how do student perceptions correspond with response accuracy on comprehension questions of different types?

These questions were of interest as we piloted reading comprehension materials (lessons and assessments) for students in the middle primary years in order to introduce a teaching strategy known as Questioning-the-Author (QtA) (Beck & McKeown, 2002; Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996). QtA is an instructional approach to comprehension which involves collaboration and discussion (Gunning, 2008). Through QtA, students use texts, queries and discussions to enhance their understanding of ideas (Beck & McKeown, 2002). It “teaches students to grapple with ideas while they read, to dig in and make sense of ideas as they initially encounter them in the text” (p. 44). In light of Singapore’s success in reading comprehension as measured by PIRLS 2001 and 2006 (Progress in International Reading...
Literacy Study), it might seem that students at P4 level do not have difficulty with reading comprehension. However, we suggest that our primary school students are trained to deal effectively with specific types of comprehension. This does not mean they are equally adept at dealing with other facets of reading comprehension – the type of comprehension developed through QtA.

In particular, QtA encourages readers to evaluate and link ideas by considering questions such as: “What is the author trying to say?” “Did the author explain this clearly?” “How does this connect with what the author told us before?” These types of questions, in our experience, are quite different from the types of reading comprehension questions to which Singaporean students are accustomed. How do students respond to these types of question – not only in terms of accuracy or correctness but also in terms of interest and perceived difficulty?

**Reading Comprehension in Singapore and International Comparisons**

In the most recent international comparison of reading skills, Singaporean P4 students have done well. Results from PIRLS, 2006 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) ranked Singapore as one of the three top performing countries. Notably, Singaporean students took the test in English and compared well with English speaking countries such as United States, England, New Zealand and Scotland, even though English is not the home or dominant language for all Singaporean children. Factors which were purported to contribute to the positive results included the high percentage of students who had pre-school education, the increasing proportion of students who use English at home, well-resourced schools, an English language syllabus with a strong emphasis on language use, and nationwide professional development oriented toward teaching with the syllabus (Singapore government press release, 29 Nov 2007).

Even in 2001, Singaporean students did well on PIRLS, ranking 15th out of 45 countries. In light of these positive results from PIRLS 2001, Wong examined pedagogical practices in reading lessons at P3 level (2006, 2007). One issue she addressed: What was happening in reading lessons that might account for Singapore’s positive results? Her small-scale study in eight neighbourhood schools at P3 level found that teachers tended to follow textbooks closely, most frequently using an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) pattern for classroom interactions. Completion of worksheets was often a target of instruction and decoding and comprehension skills were the dominant lesson focus. Functional and critical analysis skills (as discussed in the Four Resource Model [Freebody & Luke, 1990]) were rarely if ever addressed (Wong, 2007). There was considerable variability in reading proficiency among
students, even in the same class, with weaker readers perhaps needing more scaffolding and stronger readers insufficiently challenged (Wong, 2006).

In our pilot study of reading comprehension at P4 level in one neighbourhood school, presented in this paper, we also found that teacher-fronted interactions predominated, although group work was used; there was an emphasis on answering worksheet questions, with little if any meaningful, authentic, or sustained student talk. Absent from these teacher-led lessons was in-depth discussion of audience, authorship, or meaning beyond the most basic level. The number of observed lessons was quite limited – only 4 lessons in total. Nevertheless, we note that these features of the observed pilot study lessons conform to patterns found in other studies of mid-primary EL lessons in Singapore (e.g., Skuja-Steele & Silver, 2004; Silver & Skuja-Steele, 2005; Wong, 2006, 2007).

**What is Reading Comprehension?**

Is there more to reading comprehension than literal and inferencing processes? Clearly the answer is ‘yes’. Although theorists model literacy in different ways, there is agreement that it is multi-dimensional (e.g., Freebody & Luke, 1990; Gee, 1996; Kucer, 2005; Luke, 1995) and that reading comprehension, as one part of a broader view of literacy, is itself complex and multi-faceted (e.g., Damico, Campano, & Harste, 2009; Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2009; National Reading Panel Report, 2000). According to Hayes, reading “involves both reconstructing an author’s message and constructing one’s own meaning using the print on the page” (1991, p. 7). Constructing meaning refers to “building knowledge and promoting understanding” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 9). In other words, when students read a text they should “enhance their understanding”, “acquire and use their knowledge”, “monitor their understanding” and “develop insight” (p. 8). This requires going beyond literal comprehension and even beyond inferencing. Skilled readers must integrate information from a passage with personal experience and prior knowledge (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005); evaluation and critique are central to high proficiency reading comprehension (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke, 1995).

Effective reading instruction would guide learners through decoding, comprehension, functional and critical analysis skills – a view elucidated by Freebody and Luke (1990) in their Four Resources Model of literacy. In keeping with that perspective of literacy, readers need to work with texts as code breakers, text participants, text users, and text analysts. We suggest that while Singaporean students do well with code breaking (as evidenced by PIRLS results), they are not as well-versed as text participants (relating the information to their own
experience and personal knowledge), text users (thinking about context, audience, purpose), and text analysts (analyzing and critiquing texts).

With this in mind, we conducted a pilot study on reading comprehension and classroom interaction using questioning strategies which explicitly challenged students to consider purpose, audience, and authorship. A key concern in the pilot study was the level of reading comprehension difficulty, including consideration of the passage, the test items (reading comprehension questions), and students’ prior knowledge. When considering reading comprehension difficulty, we wondered not only about question types as represented in comprehension taxonomies such as Barrett (1967), Ruddell (1999) and others; about passage length and level of vocabulary—the sorts of difficulty that can be measured with ‘readability’ measures (e.g. Fry Text Readability Assessment [Fry, 1968]; Gunning Fog Index) – but also about student perceptions of difficulty and interest. We believe that perceived difficulty and interest are intertwined with learner engagement, and that engagement is crucial to the development of high proficiency reading skills (Kucer, 2005). As Wharton-McDonald and Swinger note, “Engagement is perhaps the central element in developing effective comprehension instruction in the middle grades” (2009, p. 516).

**Student Attitudes and Perceptions**

Prior research on student attitudes and perceptions has indicated a correlation between positive attitude to reading and reading comprehension scores. For example, Ghaith and Bouzeineddine (2003) reported that learners with positive attitudes towards reading were found to comprehend reading material better than those with less positive reading attitudes. Similarly, Galipault (2009) examined the attitudes of 3rd graders (P3) towards reading in light of their self-perception as readers. A positive correlation between reading attitude and assessment scores was found. However student perceptions of their own ability in reading do not necessarily align with achievement (Hanich & Jordan, 2004; Howe, Thames, & Kazelskis, 1997).

Classroom instructional practices might also have an impact on student attitudes. In a study of 8th grade (Secondary 2) students, Nichols, Jones and Hancock (2003) examined emotions and goal orientation of high and low achieving students in Science and English language arts. They also considered instructional strategies used by the teachers. The researchers found no significant correlations between student ratings on boredom, interest, anxiety, joy, and self-perceptions of learning. Notably, Nichols, et al. found that though teachers espoused a mixed pedagogy which included teacher-directed, student-centred, and interactive methods, classroom teaching tended to be more teacher-controlled and less student-centred. They
suggested that teaching methods could be the reason why “these students actually felt no real anxiety and were rarely excited about their studies” (p. 16). In other words, student emotions and goal orientation did not vary substantially between high and low achieving students because the teaching methodology did not encourage strong emotional connections or foster mastery goal orientation. Based on prior research in English teaching at the primary level in Singapore (Sam, Abdul Rahim, Teng, Guo, & Luke, 2007; Wong, 2007), we believe that teaching methods are similarly teacher-directed. We suspect that this might lead to low emotional connection to reading and less mastery goal orientation. In addition, it might discourage critical reading and deep understanding. Although our study does not take up all of these issues, the research summarized above highlights links between student attitudes, student achievement, and teaching methodology. In particular, we note that the studies cited above have not questioned student perceptions of difficulty (the difficulty of texts, the difficulty of test items) – the focus of our discussion.

As teachers, we have seen evidence of students who could analyze a set of comprehension questions to determine that they must address ‘who’, ‘where’, and ‘what’ and could answer ‘comprehension questions’ with accuracy, but subsequently the same student could not engage in discussions of characters, motivations, or cause and effect. The latter is the sort of deep understanding that we desire for our student-readers. Deeper understanding might require other types of instructional and questioning strategies (e.g., Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Raphael, George, Weber, & Nies, 2009); however, these could engender their own difficulties if students are insecure about being involved in new ways of discussing texts and addressing different types of questions.

Thus, our investigation had less to do with goal orientation, emotional response to teaching and learning, or attitudes toward learning (as in the research cited above) and more to do with student perceptions that particular reading comprehension question types were ‘easy/difficult’ or ‘interesting/uninteresting’ and how these perceptions matched with students’ ability to answer these question types accurately.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

This pilot study was conducted in a Singaporean “neighbourhood” primary school. Both the school principal and the head of English Language department expressed interest in the research project after the Principal Investigator approached the school to explain the nature of the study. Four P4 classes (134 students) and two teachers participated in this study. Consent was obtained from all student and teacher participants.
Data Collection

Data collection took place in Term 1 from March to April 2009 and spanned over four weeks. All materials for the tests and lessons were developed by the research team. Different types of readability tests, The Fry Readability Program (http://www.educational-psychologist.co.uk/fry_readability_program.htm), Gunning Fog Index, The Flesch Formula: Reading Ease & Grade Level, and Power Sumner Kearl Formula (http://www.tameri.com/teaching/levels.html) were carried out during the selection of the non-fiction materials to ensure that all reading passages were of comparable difficulty levels. Results of the readability tests showed that the passages for the lessons and tests were appropriate for students in the upper primary level in terms of the number of words and number of sentences. We wished to explore this further by checking the accuracy of students responses on reading comprehension questions related to each passage and by considering student perceptions of difficulty.

Tests were conducted in the first and fourth weeks of the study. The two tests were designed by the research team. The initial test used six non-fiction reading passages with a variety of reading comprehension questions including literal, inferential and applicative questions, which are quite typical for reading comprehension at this level. These questions made up the ‘traditional reading comprehension’ (TRC) section of the test. Questions which are typical of QtA were also included. These questions asked about issues such as the author’s purpose or meaning and about points in the passage which the author did not make clear or which might be revised for greater clarity. These questions comprised the QtA section of the test. Based on the responses to the first test, passages and items were changed to make the second test more challenging. This was to ensure a sufficient level of difficulty for all students. The second test followed the same format as the first; however, two passages were changed (as the initial passages were deemed too familiar to students) and TRC questions for two other passages were changed. Again, this was in keeping with the purpose of the pilot – to test the appropriateness of the materials. An example of a passage excerpt with one example question and possible response for each question type can be found in Appendix A. Thus, the two tests cannot be construed to be part of a pre-test/post test, experimental design and are not treated as such in this discussion.

To eliminate the effect of testing, student participants were given different passages for their first and second tests. Opinion sheets with questions to gather information on student perceptions on passage difficulty, passage interest, question type difficulty, and question type interest were designed and given out during the tests (Appendix B).
During the second and third weeks, reading comprehension lessons were conducted. Two researchers who were former primary school teachers conducted reading comprehension lessons using the QtA strategy for two classes of students. These students comprised the experimental group. At the same time, using the same reading passages, two teachers from the participating school carried out reading comprehension lessons with their own classes following their normal practices. The latter two classes formed the control group. Worksheets with traditional types of comprehension questions were crafted and given to all students, irrespective of group, at the end of each lesson.

All lessons and tests in both experimental and control groups were audio- and video-recorded to ensure that appropriate procedures were followed by the experimental group and to validate that control group did not use QtA or similar teaching strategies. It was evident from the recordings that the experimental and control lessons were different even though the same reading materials were used, and that QtA type questions (e.g. “What do you think the author wants you to understand by this passages?”) were not used in the control lessons.

**Data Analysis**

Out of 134 students, data were judged to be valid for a total of 118. Due to absenteeism (at one of the tests or from lessons) and incomplete opinion sheets, 12% of the data was deemed invalid. To code the data, the research team generated marking schemes for all eight test passages based on possible answers to each question. Subsequently the three researchers who were former teachers in Singapore schools used a 3-point scale to mark the tests. For each test item, 2 marks were given for a fully accurate answer, 1 mark was given for a partially accurate answer, and no marks were given for an inaccurate answer. Students were not penalised for grammatical or spelling errors.

Because fine-grained distinctions in student accuracy were not necessary, a ‘pass’ was determined to be at least 50% correct out of all possible marks. This was deemed to be appropriate because the purpose was to establish the suitability of the materials, not to assess student learning. Student responses on the opinion sheets were collated for questions on passage difficulty, passage interest level, difficulty of the TRC and QtA questions, and interest level of the TRC and QtA questions (Appendix B).

Data for Test 1 for all 118 students are presented below, indicating the students’ initial responses. Bearing in mind that only students in the experimental group were given lessons using the QtA strategy, and that this training might have affected test performance on the QtA section and/or changed their perceptions towards QtA questions, comparisons between Test 1 and Test 2 were made only for the experimental group. It must be borne in mind that two of
the six passages were changed for Test 2 and that some of the TRC questions were also changed. The QtA questions remained the same for both tests.

**RESULTS**

A total of 118 students participated in Test 1. Three different passages were distributed among the 118 students. Across these passages, 72% of the students were of the opinion that the reading was difficult. A slightly higher percentage, 73%, perceived the passage to be interesting. A majority of the students, 69%, perceived QtA-type questions as more difficult to answer. Almost half of the students, 45%, were of the opinion that QtA-type questions were more interesting. In terms of ‘passing’ marks, 55% of the students were able to score at least 50% of the total possible marks on QtA-type questions while 36% of the students scored at least 50% of the total possible marks on TRC-type questions. The results show that although nearly 70% of the students perceived QtA-type questions as difficult, a higher percentage of them were able to receive passing marks on that section. This was in contrast to the TRC section on which only 36% of the students received at least 50%. Table 1 shows a summary of the results.

For Test 2, similar to Test 1, student perceptions of passage difficulty, test items difficulty, and passage interest level were collated, and their responses on comprehension questions were coded and analysed. As discussed above, because of the changes to the passages and the test items as well as the possible impact of QtA instruction, comparative information for the two tests is presented only for the students in the experimental group (Table 2).

There were 51 students from the experimental group who participated in Test 1 and Test 2. For the experimental group, there was a decrease in the percentage of students who perceived the passage as difficult from 71% at Test 1 to 61% at Test 2. For Test 1, 57% of the experimental group students perceived the passage as interesting but this decreased to 45% for Test 2. The percentage of experimental group students who perceived QtA-type questions
Table 1

*Student Responses in Test 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Test 1 (n = 118)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passage difficulty</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not difficult</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passage interest level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interesting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question type difficulty: QtA was</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to answer</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More difficult to answer</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question type interest level: QtA was</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interesting</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less interesting</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1 (TRC)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores of at least 50% of total possible</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores lower than 50% of total possible</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2 (QtA)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores of at least 50% of total possible</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores lower than 50% of total possible</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as easier to answer increased from 22% at Test 1 to 45% at Test 2. The percentage of experimental group students who were of the opinion that QtA-type questions were less interesting increased from 55% at Test 1 to 73% at Test 2. There was a slight increase in the percentage of experimental group students who scored at least 50% of the total possible marks for QtA-type questions, from 43% at Test 1 to 47% at Test 2. In comparison, for the TRC-type questions, the percentage of experimental group students who scored at least 50% of the total possible marks decreased from 27% at Test 1 to 8% at Test 2. The results show that for the experimental group, there was not only an increase in percentage of students who perceived QtA-type questions as less interesting and easier to answer, but also an increase in percentage for those who were able to score at least 50% of total possible marks for QtA questions. Since some of the TRC questions were revised to make them more difficult on Test 2, the decrease in ‘pass’ marks on that section of the second test is not surprising.
Table 2

Experimental Group Student Responses in Tests 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Test 1 (n = 51)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Test 2 (n = 51)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>% of students</td>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>% of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage difficulty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not difficult</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage interest level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interesting</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question type difficulty: QtA was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to answer</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More difficult to answer</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question type interest level: QtA was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interesting</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less interesting</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1 (TRC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores of at least 50% of total possible</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores lower than 50% of total possible</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2 (QtA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores of at least 50% of total possible</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores lower than 50% of total possible</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION OF DATA**

Our goal was to determine the type of questions P4 students found easy or difficult, and interesting to answer. The findings from the experimental group show that QtA questions were perceived as more difficult to answer than TRC questions. They seem to suggest that initially the students found QtA questions more interesting to answer than the TRC questions. However, after gaining experience with this question type, the students regarded this type of question as less interesting. We also sought to find out if the student perceptions of difficulty and interest of the question types matched the accuracy of the answers in the worksheets they completed. From the findings, it was evident that there was no match. They perceived that the QtA questions were more difficult to answer than the traditional ones, yet they did better when answering them. In contrast, in Test 2, the experimental group students perceived the QtA questions to be less interesting and still they did better at them as compared with the TRC questions.

QtA questions like “What do you think the author wants you to understand from this section of the text?” and “What would you like the author to explain more clearly in this section?” require students to express their opinions, linking their own ideas with the passage. We
believe that this is something which the P4 students in our pilot study were not used to doing. In particular, although they were trained to answer examination-like questions similar to our TRC questions, they had not been trained to read, comprehend, and develop critical opinions. Hence, it is not surprising that these students would deem QtA questions more difficult to answer.

In Test 2, the percentage of experimental group students who said that QtA questions were “more difficult” decreased. We suggest that this was a function of familiarity: These students had had two reading comprehension lessons based on QtA. They knew what to expect for this type of question and this could cause them to say that QtA questions were not as difficult as they had previously thought. However, it is worth noting that 55% of them still thought the QtA type questions were difficult to answer.

We expected that students would find the QtA questions to be more intriguing than the TRC questions. However, in terms of question type and interest, on both tests, the majority of students claimed that QtA questions were less interesting. Again this might relate to familiarity and training, but it is difficult to speculate on the student thinking behind the responses. We suggest that interviews with students would be a useful way to probe student perceptions further. Student interest did not match performance either. In Test 1, 55% of the students found TRC questions more interesting than QtA ones; in Test 2, 73% of the students found TRC questions to be more interesting. Yet in both cases, students did not fare as well in answering TRC questions. Conversely, they did not find QtA questions as interesting, yet did well in them. Finally, we address the connection between student perception and the accuracy of student responses. We might expect a ‘training effect’ such that students would be more accurate on TRC questions. However, on both Tests 1 and 2, the students did better on the QtA questions. In short, how students perceived the difficulty of a question type did not necessary correspond with their performance on that type of question. The purpose of QtA questions is to promote deeper thinking in students while they are reading texts, so this type of questioning is meant to be difficult. However, the perceived difficulty of the questions does not mean that they are not manageable.

The higher accuracy rate on the QtA questions could be because the answers to QtA questions were more open-ended, with more options for a ‘correct’ response (see Appendix A). In this sense, the QtA questions are actually ‘easier’ (i.e. easier to answer correctly), though they are more ‘difficult’ in that they require more independent and critical thought. This duality in QtA type questions – many options for a ‘correct’ response but any one answer requires considerable thinking and understanding – makes them a powerful resource.
for reading comprehension, even though they are clearly unfamiliar to our primary school students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore for funding to conduct this pilot study. We also thank Galyna Kogut and Huynh Thi Canh Dien who assisted in all aspects of the project. Finally, we deeply appreciate the primary school and teachers who agreed to participate, allowed us to observe their teaching, and let us work with their students. The views expressed in this paper are, of course, the authors’ and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centre, the Institute, or the others who were involved in the study.

1 Wong’s study was a small scale case study investigating only 26 reading lessons. Although these results cannot be considered to be generalisable on their own, an earlier investigation of Singapore EL teaching at P4 level found similar patterns for textbook use, teacher-fronted classroom interaction, and worksheets as a dominant instructional and assessment tool (Skuja-Steele & Silver, 2004; Silver & Skuja-Steele, 2005).

2 This study was funded by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore (http://www.crpp.nie.edu.sg). The views expressed in this paper are the authors’ and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centre or the Institute.

3 See also Hoffman (2009) for discussion of why a ‘simple view’ of reading comprehension is problematic and even dangerous.


5 See http://www.tameri.com/teaching/levels.html for explanations and examples.

6 Raphael, et al (2009) also point out that other types of reading materials (e.g. beyond textbooks) and interactions (multimedia, electronic) are essential for developing high proficiency reading in the 21st century.

7 Classes were solicited by the school. No information about class profile (mixed ability, high ability, etc.) was given to the research team.
REFERENCES


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Word Count: 5,572 excluding appendices. 6,156 including appendices.

Page Length (single spaced): 13 pages, including appendices
APPENDIX A

Passage excerpt with example questions and answers

Passage excerpt:
Long before there were clocks, people relied on regular, natural events to keep track of time. They worked, ate, and slept according to the rising and setting of the Sun. Today, we use the word “day” not only to describe the 24 hours from one midnight to the next, but also the period of light from sunrise to sunset.

Test 1

TRC Question
Example: How did people keep time before clocks were created?
Suggested Answer: They relied on regular, natural events to keep track of time.

QtA Question
Example: What do you think the author wants you to understand from this section of the text?
Suggested Answer: How people came up with methods to tell time. (Or a similar response.)

Test 2

TRC Question
Example: Before they had clocks, people used natural events to keep time. What were the two types of natural events that people used to keep time before they had clocks?
Suggested Answers:
- The two types of natural events were the rising (1 mark) and the setting of the sun (1 mark).
- They saw the sunset and sunrise with a sundial in order to tell time. (partially wrong – 1 mark)

QtA Question
Example: What do you think the author wants you to understand from this section of the text?
Suggested Answers:
- The author wants me to understand how people came up with methods/ways to tell time. (2 marks)
- He wants me to understand how people told time in the past (1 mark) and what were used. (1 mark)
- The author wants us to understand how people keep track of time when they had no clocks. (2 marks)
- The author wants me to understand that people used the rising and setting sun (1 mark) and the four seasons to tell time. (1 mark)
• How people tell time without clocks. (2 marks)
• How people know the time before the clocks were invented. (2 marks)
• The author wants me to understand that before there were clocks, the people relied on regular natural events to keep track of time. (2 marks)
• Long ago/last time, there were no clocks. (partial answer – 1 mark)
• How people live without clocks last time. (partial answer – 1 mark)
• Understand about ‘time’ in this section. (partial answer – 1 mark)

APPENDIX B

Student opinion survey

We want to know your opinion about the passage you have read. Please tell us what you think!

Title of the text you read: ______________________________________________

1) How difficult was this passage to read? Circle your answer.
   Very difficult A little difficult Not very difficult Easy

2) How interesting was this passage to read? Circle your answer.
   Not at all interesting Not very interesting Interesting Very interesting

3) Which question was the easiest to answer? Write the question number.
   Part 1, question number ______
   Part 2, question number ______

4) Which question was the most difficult to answer? Write the question number.
   Part 1, question number ______
   Part 2, question number ______

5) Were the questions in part 2 easier or harder? Put a tick (✓) by the answer.
   _____ Part 2 was easier to answer.
   _____ Part 2 was more difficult to answer.

6) Were the questions in part 2 more or less interesting? Put a tick (✓) by the answer.
   _____ Part 2 was more interesting.
   _____ Part 2 was less interesting.

Thank you!