

## **Fostering Cross-cultural Communication and Understanding in the English Language Writing Class**

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### **KEY IMPLICATIONS**

- Link cross-cultural skills with particular subject areas such as writing in English classrooms
- Operationalize the C (Culture) in PACC (Purpose, Audience, Context and Culture)
- Train teachers how to facilitate cross-cultural learning and skills development in the writing classroom

### **BACKGROUND**

Cross-cultural skills are core components of the Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore which highlights the skills necessary for negotiating today's globalized world as well as Singapore's multicultural context. Thus, it is now time to look at the classroom as the crucial context for the making of cross-culturally aware and skilful young Singaporeans. To what extent are cross-cultural skills promoted in the local classrooms in Singapore?

### **FOCUS OF STUDY**

This study's goal was to explore how secondary school teachers develop learners' cross-cultural communication skills, if at all, in their writing lessons. Specifically, the research project had two key objectives.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

The study found that teachers did not plan for cross-cultural facilitation in the classroom. Classroom practice also did not produce episodes of tackling cross-cultural issues. Additionally, there was lack of cross-cultural facilitation in all lessons observed.

Three main reasons emerged for the lack of attention to the teaching of cross-cultural issues in the classrooms:

1. An emphasis on examination related practices and neglect of cross-cultural competence due to its absence from the assessment criteria
2. The underestimation of students' cognitive abilities based on their language proficiency
3. Teachers' fears that a focus on cross-cultural issues would unnecessarily surface sensitive topics that they felt ill-equipped to handle

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS**

#### **Implications for Practice**

There is a need for more explicit definitions and pedagogical guidance for English Language (EL) teachers regarding cross-cultural skills and competencies and how they should be taught. In the context of writing pedagogy specifically, there is a need to (1) explain conceptually how writing skills and cross-cultural skills are related,

and (2) show through sample lesson plans how writing is taught while developing 'global' citizens in the classroom.

### **Implications for Policy and Research**

There is a need to link the core competencies framework with classroom practice, especially through a clear and explicit articulation of how particular competencies could be incorporated into the classroom.

### **POPULATION**

Three secondary schools and two teachers from each of these schools were involved in the study.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Lesson observations (video and audio recorded) were conducted over a two-week period that generally covered a Unit of Work. Units selected were those from the teachers' scheme of work which focused on either a narrative or argumentative text as these text types would provide ample opportunities to develop the students' voices as writers, engage them in expressing their own meanings, and develop their cultural awareness. A total of 31.5 hours of teaching were observed from all six teachers. In addition, four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with all participating teachers.

### **About the authors**

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