A Pedagogy for Teacher Education: Making Theory, Practice, and Context Connections for English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This article discusses a pedagogic intervention on a pre-service teacher education course for student-teachers learning to teach English in the Singaporean, multilingual primary school. A case-method pedagogy was conceptualised in response to the teaching environment of Singapore and driven by two questions: one about the ability of student-teachers to make theory/practice connections, and the other about how they might develop professional values. Two examples of the case studies were presented as they were employed during the course provide data. Another set comes from a survey which elicited student-teachers' reflections on their experiences of learning using this case-method pedagogy. The findings demonstrate that the contextualisation provided by the cases gave student-teachers opportunities for making effective theory/practice connections. It also led them to personalise their learning. Additionally, the results about ethics were suggestive of the development of professional values, showing an unexpected catalysis of a future-orientation to the profession. However, since the results about the development of teaching values were not conclusive, the article provided discussions on the current issue. Nevertheless, the case-method pedagogy is recommended as effective in teacher preparation, enabling theory and practice to be visibly connected through context.

Keywords:

Teacher Education; English Language Teaching; Primary School; Theory/Practice; Multilingual Context

Authors' Notes

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Introduction

This paper shows how the need for student-teachers to relate theory to practice and develop appropriate professional values is accounted for in the design and implementation of a pedagogy for teacher education in Singapore. An issue often presented in the international literature on teacher preparation is the difficulty experienced by student-teachers in making connections between theory and practice such are cases for Allen (2009) and Liston, Whitcomb and Borko (2006). In Asia, Cheng, Tang, and Cheng (2012) made similar observations about the situation in Hong Kong. Being able to make these theory/practice connections is essential for teachers, given the situated nature of teaching which requires the application of

many different types of knowledge in the immediate practical situation of the classroom (Twiselton, 2006). Another issue foregrounded in twenty-first century thinking about teacher education is the necessity for teachers not only to have a variety of knowledge and skills but to practise the appropriate attitudes and values in their relationships with children (National Institute of Education [NIE], 2009).

Nevertheless, Darling-Hammond (2006), Shulman (1996), and Merseth (1996), for example, all suggest that this difficulty for student-teachers can be compounded by ineffective and inappropriate pedagogies employed on teacher education courses which do not take into account the complex nature of teaching knowledge and how it is constructed. The difficulties for Singaporean student-teachers of English in making theory/practice links and developing professional values are exacerbated by particular features of their country and educational context. Family size being small means that young student-teachers do not have instinctive knowledge about children and families; the textbooks used are, of necessity, imported; the children they will teach are linguistically diverse. Thus, this article reports on an intervention research study which involves the design and implementation of a pedagogy to guide student-teachers into making theory/practice links from an implicit values standpoint, taking into account these characteristics of the setting. It is particular in its focus on preparing teachers for primary school English teaching in Singapore but has an additional wider relevance in the use of the case method for pre-service teacher education and the attention to developing ethics. The two research questions of the study asked how effectively might student-teachers make theory/practice connections through the study of cases (Shulman, 1996), and whether the case method would allow appropriate professional values to develop. At the end of the course during which this pedagogy (among other methods) was implemented, student-teachers' reflections on their learning were gathered through an open-ended survey and analysed thematically.

The article begins by briefly reviewing the relevant literature on teacher education. It then synthesizes the knowledge, skills, and values desirable in teachers of English and provides an explanation of three features of the Singaporean context thought likely to affect student-teachers' learning. The section describing the research intervention discusses the design of the pedagogy and offers examples of its application. Its potential for use is discussed through analysing student-teachers' reflections.

Literature Review

Pedagogy for Teacher Education

Superficially and observably easy, yet teaching is an extremely complex activity (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Loughran & Russell, 2007). Teacher education is just as complex. During preparatory courses, students of teaching have to learn about disciplinary content drawn from many areas, learn about learning and about teaching (Loughran, 2006). Although now viewed as an academic discipline (Loughran & Russell, 2007), much of the experiential knowledge about what teaching and learning constitute is tacit and embodied in those who engage in it. In order for teacher education to occur, teacher educators and students of teaching have to engage in self-study (Hoban 1997; Loughran & Russell, 2007), which will enable the articulation of practice in a shared metalanguage and allow student-teachers to connect theory with practice.

Loughran (2006) notes that traditionally, there has been more attention to the cognitive elements with the content of teacher preparation than to teaching the pedagogical reasoning necessary for students to access the depths of thinking behind the application of theory in practice. He argues that in order to teach the thinking behind practice, instead of merely modelling, pedagogies of teacher education should "give students access to the pedagogical reasoning, uncertainties and dilemmas of practice that are inherent in understanding teaching as being problematic" (Loughran, 2006, p.6). This reasoning links theory and practice which allows theory to be called upon to reason a practical teaching situation.

Specifically, in delineating the "how" of teacher education of the 21st century, Darling-Hammond (2006) recommends "newly emerging pedagogies" (p.307). She spells them out as the "extensive use of case methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio evaluation that apply learning to real problems of practice" and "explicit strategies to help students to confront their own

deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students and to learn about the experiences of people different from themselves" (2006, p.305). Fernandez (2010), in a research on the effective use of Microteaching Lesson Study for pre-service education, provides an example. The study employed some of the pedagogies recommended by Darling-Hammond (2006), including the inbuilt analysis, discussion, reflection, and revision of Lesson Study, with good results. Fernandez observed her students developing mathematical pedagogic reasoning as well as learning the content they would teach.

The Values of Teaching

In addition to knowledge and skills, writers have argued for teachers to develop the values and particular ways of thinking that are required for wise teaching (Arlin, 1999) or teacher excellence (Collinson, 1999). According to Arlin (1999, p.14), teachers need to develop the mental maturity to develop a sense of context, to be flexible and creative, and to realise that there are different perspectives on and methods of instruction. They also need to learn not to work in absolutes but to develop a sense of uncertainty about the process and product of instruction. Lunenberg, Korthagen, and Willemse (2007) argue that this has to be done explicitly, for example, one learning outcome on the course they describe is "the student will be able to clarify his or her teaching values and norms, and will be able to relate these to his or her teaching practice" (p.170). They conclude that values should permeate the whole teacher education programme through reflection catalyzed by means of instructional strategies such as moral analysis charts. These researchers see students' personal as well as professional identities involved in the process of adopting professional values. They argue that in order to support explicit teaching there needs to be an accepted metalanguage about values which, they note, is at the moment largely tacit (2007, p.171/2).

Making values explicit can be seen in the context of Singapore teacher education, where values and dispositions have been articulated in a report titled, *A Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century* (2009). The report considers teacher education generally in terms of values, skills, and knowledge (V^3SK). This model includes three value paradigms: learner-centred values, teacher identity, and service to the profession and community. Of most relevance for this research are the learner-centred values of empathy, the belief that all children can learn, the commitment to nurturing the potential in each child, and the valuing of diversity.

The Knowledge and Skills for Teaching English

Teaching young children to read and write is a highly complex activity and preparing students of teaching to do this is even more so, particularly in multilingual contexts, such as Singapore, about which there is little published discussion, as noted by Freeman and Johnson (1998). Teacher educators have considered the knowledge and skills needed by the expert teacher, for example, Arlin (1999), Berg (2010), Collinson (1999), and Shulman (1986), the literacy teacher, for example, Cervetti, Damico and Pearson (2006) and Twiselton (2006) and the teacher of bilingual or multilingual pupils, for example, Freeman and Johnson (1998) and Bernhardt (1994). Others, such as Koda (2005) and Genesee, Geva, Dressler and Kamil (2006), argue that some knowledge of contrastive linguistics is essential for teachers of English since children who speak other languages may approach learning English through the framework of their first language. For student-teachers to be prepared to teach young children in multilingual contexts, therefore, they require broad professional knowledge and skills in addition to those more specifically associated with teaching language. The main skills and knowledge for English language teaching have been culled from the literature and are shown in Table 1 (see page 71).

The Context of Teaching

The educational context comprises the people involved in teaching and learning, their knowledge and their relationships, the teaching and learning activities, the texts and materials, the technologies and their purposes, the culture of school and society, and educational policy. The importance of context in general teacher education has been emphasized by Arlin (1999) and Collinson (1999). Of five criteria for 'wise' teaching, Arlin states one as, 'a sense of the context of instruction and the context in which the students are being instructed' (1999, p.7). Twisleton (2006) and Freeman and Johnson (1998) similarly advocate contextual understanding as necessary for effective English language teaching. Twiselton even suggests that teacher expertise consists of 'the ability to perceive the demands of a situation as it arises' (2006,

Table 1. The knowledge and skills teachers require to teach English in multilingual contexts

about language	*about children*	*about pedagogy*
• knowledge about the English language • knowledge about how language is learnt and acquired as a home language and a language for school	• knowledge of how children learn first and subsequent languages from different perspectives, for example, psycholinguistic, socio-cultural and multiliteracy perspectives	• knowledge of pedagogy, both in general and specific to language learning and development
• knowledge of more than one language and how it contrasts with the variety of English to be taught in school	• knowledge of child development and theories of learning and development	• knowledge of assessment, both in general and specific to language learning and development
• knowledge of the features of the main languages in a multilingual society in relation to the variety of English to be taught in school	• knowledge of texts and other materials produced for children including textbooks and children's literature	• knowledge of the English language syllabus and curriculum
• communication skills • skills in contrastive linguistics	• relationship building skills	• pedagogic and assessment skills, for example, lesson planning and material preparation • reflective skills • evaluative skills • analytic skills

p.89) and simultaneously draw on a variety knowledge and skills from different sources and disciplines to be effective in practice. Thus, a knowledge of context from broad social and educational perspectives as well as from the particular perspectives of the classroom and learners is necessary. In addition to skills, knowledge, and values, therefore, it is argued that a sense of context should be a significant component of teacher preparation.

Three specific aspects of the Singaporean context, in particular, affect the ways in which student-teachers are able to connect theory with practice. First, given the changing educational practices and demographics in Singapore, the young student-teachers today have less to do with children than their counterparts, ten years ago. In Singapore, the household size has decreased over the years. While, in the past, people lived with extended families and had more children of their own, now the average household size in Singapore is three people or fewer. Channel News Asia (2010) reports that the proportion of households with two to three people increased from 36% in 2000 to nearly 41% in 2009, and Thang (2005) states that in 1990 the average number of people per household was 4.2 while in 2000 it was 3.7. Thus, students are often less familiar with all the out-of-school aspects of children's development, a factor which may make them less empathetic to and understanding of children's social and emotional needs, as well as of familial constraints and pressures.

The second consideration is the educational policy context of Singapore. In the primary school, class size is large, although starting from 2001 it has been reduced from 40 to 30 pupils in the lower primary (Ministry of Education, n.d., p.25). This affects how much time teachers have with individual children and, consequently, how well they may understand pupils in their classes. Another feature of the Singaporean educational context is the policy of bilingualism in the national curriculum (Shanmugaratnam, 2002). The policy mandates all children in primary school learn English, which is the medium of instruction, and a mother tongue language made from a selection, but most commonly Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil. As a result, the primary classroom is multilingual and

children have at least two languages and language varieties to draw on as they learn the languages and the subjects of the school curriculum. The varieties of English identified among children in Singapore by Gupta (1994) are Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). According to the syllabi, the school variety of English is 'internationally acceptable English' (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.10).

Third, the main textbooks set for the course are written for countries and contexts other than Singapore. The textbooks used are by Winch, Ross Johnston, March, Ljungdahl and Holliday (2010) and Tompkins (2014) in addition to the English syllabi past and current (Ministry of Education, 2009; 2000; 1991). These textbooks were selected for their quality of content, clarity of language, coverage, and layout. Winch et al (2010) is published in Australia and takes a functional and genre-based approach to teaching language and literacy, while Tompkins (2014) is published in the USA and is oriented to language arts. However, naturally the books are written to prepare teachers to teach in the country of publication, and neither book is written with the multilingual pupil to the fore. Therefore, on the course, other readings supplement these two main texts. These additional readings either refer specifically to teaching in Singapore or the ASEAN region or to teaching in multilingual contexts, for example, Chew (2005), Cheah (2003), and Sripathy (1998).

The Pre-Service Curriculum Studies Course

The pre-service curriculum studies course of the intervention study is the first of four that students read on their degree programme. Here, student-teachers learn how to teach children how to read and write English in the lower primary, that is, when children are about 6 to 8 years old. Prior to this study, the course was revamped according to the design principle of key concepts (Buckingham, 1994). This foregrounding of concepts rather than the previous organizing principles of topics, methods, and teaching strategies was to ensure a pedagogic focus on reflection and the development of student teacher metacognition, that is, their awareness of professional considerations in teaching situations. The course design was inspired by general critiques made by Korthagen and Kessels (1999) and Darling-Hammond (2006) of teacher education. The employment of concepts also enabled coherence and spiral progression across the series of curriculum studies courses, thus rectifying another common design flaw identified by Darling-Hammond (2006). The key concepts for the course are:

- diversity and individual differences
- the home/school transition
- the importance of spoken language in teaching and learning
- the processes of learning and acquisition (Krashen, 1989)
- the contextualisation of language
- the differences between spoken and written English
- varieties of English
- stages of literacy development
- creativity and conformity in children's writing

An important central focus of the course, to which many of the key concepts are related, is the role of spoken English in education. For example, the course teaches about the significance of multilingual children's spoken language in their development of English literacy. In contrast to children who acquire the spoken form of language at home before schooling, which is the experience presented in the imported course textbooks, Singaporean multilingual children most often have to learn the spoken and written forms of the language simultaneously in school (Gregory & Kenner, 2003; Moll & Dworin, 1996). In addition, the significance of spoken English language for children's participation in instruction and for their cognitive, social, and emotional development is considered on the course.

Thus, making theory/practice connections is recognized as a difficulty throughout teacher education. The redesign of the curriculum studies courses reflects a concern with this issue through the preference for teaching concepts and principles rather than procedures. Nevertheless, some particular social and educational features of the Singaporean setting may exacerbate the process of linking theory to practice for student-teachers; for example, the fact that their textbooks do not reflect their future teaching context may distance Singaporean teachers from experiential knowledge of schooling even more than their counterparts in other countries. Another concern about how to teach professional ethics is set against

local factors such as the small family size which might militate against the development of empathy. In following Darling-Hammond (2006), Merseth (1996), and Shulman (1996), the intervention using a case-method pedagogy seeks to involve student-teachers in situated knowledge construction about the practice of language teaching as a means to assist them in making theory/practice connections and developing professional values.

Methodology

Design of the pedagogy

Given the considerations of context discussed above and the reported difficulties for student-teachers in making theory/practice links (Allen, 2009; Cheng et al, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Liston, Whitcomb & Borko, 2006), the task of learning to teach English in the English medium primary school in a multilingual society is certainly not straightforward. Usually, the university in which students learn and the schools in which they will teach are distant. However, this research on the use of the case method shows how there might be, in addition to practicums, school experiences, and attachments, a pedagogic means of contextualising theory and practice within the university itself so as to effectively prepare students for their careers in schools. This study, serves as, an intervention project to assess the effect of using a case-method approach (Shulman, 1996) on one teacher education curriculum studies course. Cases were intended as exemplars and to provide opportunities for students to practice analysis and contemplate action (Merseth, 1996, p. 729). While the intervention took place with the full cohort of students taking the pre-service curriculum studies course, only one class of 19 student-teachers was asked to complete the reflective survey.

Two research questions were posed to guide the construction and implementation of this pre-service pedagogy. They are:

1. How far is it possible to help students of teaching to use their knowledge to make theory and practice connections though the study of cases on curriculum studies pre-service courses?
2. How far is it possible to teach values and dispositions through the study of cases on curriculum studies pre-service courses?

The case method was chosen because of its potential for enabling students of teaching to connect theory and experience (Merseth, 1996). Shulman notes that cases 'draw their pedagogical power *from* theory without being *about* theory (1996, p.200) and that student-teachers have to 'learn to move up and down, back and forth, between the memorable peculiarities of cases and the powerful generalizations and simplifications of principles and theories' (1996, p.201). Additionally, Darling-Hammond argues that cases 'link theory and practice in ways that theorize practice and make formal learning practical' (2006, p.307). She notes the extensive use of cases on exemplary teacher education programmes. In her opinion, the study of cases is a pedagogy of teacher education particularly suitable for the 21st century as it reflects our understandings of the way knowledge is both situated and constructed (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The cases used in the intervention pedagogy consist of samples of pupils' school reading and writing and are literally brought from schools to the university. They, therefore, make visible, tangible, and personal the links between theory and practice and between the two contexts of school and university. The samples were sourced from schools on professional development courses or generated as part of research projects. Permission was sought to use the children's work in teacher education, according to the usual ethical guidelines, and anonymity guaranteed for the schools, teachers, pupils, and parents.

The analysis of the examples of children's reading and writing was guided by Shulman's (1996) important considerations about what constitutes a case and what it exemplifies. However, out of this preparatory analysis of forty pieces of pupils' reading and writing, very few were suitable. The difficulty lay in finding those examples which could fulfill the dual functions of exemplifying and contextualising some of the key concepts of the course, as well as enabling student-teachers to develop some of the skills, knowledge, values, and dispositions of teaching. The selected cases had to be *teaching* cases as well as *example* cases, enabling both a generalization to principle and the study of the detail of the particular. Once selected for use in tutorials, the samples were

anonymised by being typed out, and audio rather than video recording was used. They were, nevertheless, personalised through the use of pseudonyms.

In that the sample cases metaphorically bring children into the university, they personalise and situate learning in context (Shulman, 1992). However, as Shulman (1996) notes, the appreciation of experience cannot be constructed as knowledge without reflection. Darling-Hammond (2006) and Shulman (1996) both value the case method for its potential to encourage reflection. Additionally, according to Merseth (1996), the study of cases is especially suitable for guiding student thinking towards reflection; therefore, the analysis of example cases may encourage the deepening of student-teachers' knowledge as well as the honing of their skills. In following this line of thinking, the cases for this research study, were constructed to provide opportunities for student-teachers to practise and analyse assessment and instructional strategies and enable them to make links to and evaluate theory. Moreover, the cases guide students to consider not only theory and practice but how they are connected, given the educational context of Singapore. The design of the pedagogy thus includes these questions to encourage reflection.

1. What can the child do on this task?

2. What difficulties does he/she experience on this task? Why do you think this might be?

3. What do you think the child's ideas and feelings are about this task?

4. What are your suggestions for future instruction for this child?

5. Referring to this experience and to your readings, consider the issues involved in using this assessment or teaching strategy in the lower primary classroom.

Discussion is an important means to reflection (Shulman, 1999). The guiding questions are intended, therefore, not only to encourage reflection, but debate. For Merseth (1996) it is through dialogue that knowledge is constructed and theory/practice connections made. She therefore regards opportunities for discussion as an essential element of the case method. As students engage in the study of the cases, they are thus given chances to use the professional language associated with teaching through which they have opportunities to connect experience with theory. This allows a shared metalanguage to develop which according to Loughran (2006) will assist reflection and make pedagogical reasoning explicit.

Moreover, Shulman (1992) notes the traditional use of cases in highlighting the ethics of a situation. In their educational use, he suggests that cases are 'embedded in contexts of application and emotion, of place and time' (p.7). It is consequently likely that because of the call on emotions their use might lead student-teachers into developing the appropriate values and dispositions of teaching. Guiding question three is designed to direct student-teachers' thinking to the child's point of view with the aim of encouraging their feelings of empathy.

To assess the effects of the pedagogy on student-teachers' learning, they were asked to complete a survey at the end of their course. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit student-teachers' comments and opinions on the use of both the sample cases and their textbooks. There was no attempt made to influence student-teachers' thinking by any discussion of the survey questions. The data was anonymized and first coded by line to identify themes (Charmaz, 2006). On a second reading of the data, thematic categories were identified and refined (Merriam, 1998). They are presented in Table 4. Discourse analysis was applied to the terms students used in referring to the children of the case studies.

Intervention

The sequence of teaching using the cases consists: preparation phase of front loading of theory. Before tutorials, students read about and prepare to discuss a theoretical perspective from their textbook following a reading guide. In addition, they read about an instructional or assessment practice which is underpinned by the theory. Primed with partial understanding of theory and knowledge about a practical strategy, a second learning experience phase in tutorial allows students to revise and clarify the instructional practice. Students then listen to or read the sample case of pupil reading or writing and analyse it by drawing on their three knowledge bases of the instructional or assessment practice, the theory,

and the school and socio-cultural context of Singapore (Twiselton, 2006). This phase of the tutorial moves between presentation and explanation, students' individual analysis, and small group discussion. The final phase of the pedagogy consists of reflection on the theory and practice which is achieved by means of small group and then plenary discussion. Students are thus able to evaluate the appropriateness and efficacy of the instructional or assessment practice for the context of Singapore.

Findings: Two examples of the pedagogy in practice

Two brief illustrative examples of the case-method pedagogy showing the second two phases- the learning experience and reflection phases, are given here. These phases of learning experience and reflection are structured around the aforementioned guiding questions.

Sample: Jason's reading aloud of a reading scheme book.

In this activity, student-teachers listen to Jason's reading aloud. He reads a reading scheme book designed to help children learn to read. The students note the inaccuracies or miscues in Jason's reading and use them to analyse the skills he implements and the knowledge he draws on in reading. This formative assessment tool is referred to either as taking a running record (Winch et al, 2010 p.141) or carrying out a miscue analysis (Goodman, 1996). As Winch et al state:

> Miscues may be of a phonological-graphological, grammatical, semantic nature, and an experienced teacher can gain important information from the results on the reading achievement and skills of the reader concerned. Interpretation of the results is of major importance; just counting the errors is to short-circuit a complex reading process (Goodman, 1997). An analysis of each error is necessary (2010, p.141).

The analysis of Jason's reading is shown in Table 2. The bulleted points are those raised by student-teachers in their discussions. They show student-teachers observing, analysing and reflecting.

First, student-teachers' observations of the words Jason reads accurately and his application of the processes of inference and prediction show them drawing on theories about the reading process in discussing decoding and sight/sound correspondences as well as comprehension. They are calling upon their knowledge about how children learn languages. Second, their observations to the second guiding question revealed how student-teachers are led to consider a detailed focus on miscues. They discover the pattern to Jason's errors which concern his recognition of English tenses. Here, students apply their knowledge of Singapore's linguistic context and contrast Mandarin with English to arrive at the suggestion that Jason might be overusing reading strategies best applied to reading in Mandarin. The third question sees students deploying their broader knowledge of schools and assessment practices to understand how Jason might view the formative assessment task of the running record as summative assessment.

Sample: Nora's writing of a picture composition

Nora writes for a picture composition task designed by her school. In this case, pupils are asked to write a story of at least 120 words using some pictures as guide. The pictures are arranged in a numbered sequence. The final one indicates that pupils should create an ending for their stories. There are words boxed up underneath the pictures which include: television addict, forced, reluctantly, crept, midnight, continued, horror movie, disobedient, frightened and trembling. The analysis of Nora's writing is in Table 3.

Table 2. Jason's reading aloud of a reading scheme book

1. What can the child do on this task?
observation and analysis:
• Jason recognizes and reads common high frequency words, for example, numbers and "cat", "fat", "kids". • He recognizes and reads the high frequency word "said." • He recognizes and reads some disyllabic words, for example, "sandwich", "yoghurt." • He self-corrects at word and sentence level. • He uses knowledge of spoken language to infer and predict words.
reflection:
• Jason draws on his knowledge of spoken language to make sight sound correspondences.
2. What difficulties does he/she experience on this task? Why do you think this might be?
observation and analysis:
• Jason misreads verbs in the past continuous and irregular simple past. Although he recognizes some of the letters of these words, he does not decode. • He reads unfamiliar words incorrectly by using the initial consonant and then guessing the rest of the word, for example, "shiny" for "skinny", "giraffe for griffin", "like" for "look." • His reading is 87.5% accurate which is below the appropriate instructional level of between 90% to 95%, given in Winch et al (2010, p.141).
reflection:
• Jason could be relying on the sight recognition strategies useful in his home language of Mandarin, rather than decoding by segmenting words according to their sounds. • He could be drawing on his knowledge of spoken SCE in which tense is not marked by morphology as it is in English (Ho, 2003).
3. What do you think the child's ideas and feelings are about this task?
observation and analysis:
• Jason completely skips two pages without self-correcting, suggesting that he is not reading for meaning but as if being tested.
reflection:
• This kind of formative assessment (running records) is not common in primary schools which favor summative assessment (Cheah, 1998). Jason is behaving as though this is a test.

Table 3. Nora's writing of a picture composition

1. What can the child do on this task?
observation and analysis:
• Nora infers character motivation from a series of pictures. • She writes an appropriately structured narrative. • She includes character feelings. • She uses dialogue. • She sequences and uses adverbials of time. • She spells high frequency words, for example, "then", "the", "go", "sleep", "see", "to", "out", accurately.
reflection:
• Nora completes the task at text level using the appropriate genre.
2. What difficulties does he/she experience on this task? Why do you think this might be?
observation and analysis:
• Nora spells the past tense of watched "watch". • She uses "have or have not" for "is there" and "dont heve" for "there is not". • She uses social vocabulary, for example, "chang the story" for switching channels on the television, "gost come outthen" when describing the appearance of the ghost, "open" and "close" for switching the television on and off. • She spells multisyllabic words inaccurately, for example, "television" using variations such as "tilalvichan", "telivichan", and "tilivichan".

- She use collocations such as "havri they" possibly for every day.

reflection:

- The spelling difficulty, for example "wacht" may be due to the use of SCE in which final consonants are often not sounded (Bao, 1998). This pronunciation of past tense is likely to affect spelling (Ho, 2003).
- "Have or have not" is a feature of SCE originating, perhaps, in Mandarin directly translated as "yǒu méi yǒu" (有没有) and "dont heve" as "méi yǒu" (没有).
- The spelling of "have" as "heve" reflects a common pronunciation in SCE in which /e/ is sometimes substituted for /æ/ (Hashim and Brown, 2000).
- The social vocabulary comes from SCE.
- Nora does not apply spelling rules but relies on knowledge of sounds to make correspondences. This is possibly because of her knowledge of the importance of sounds in Malay in which there is a more regular sight to sound correspondence than in English.

3. What do you think the child's ideas and feelings are about this task?

observation and analysis:

- Nora can follow the task procedurally but her vocabulary and the task vocabulary are at different levels.
- The task expects academic vocabulary but Nora uses social vocabulary.

reflection:

- The vocabulary supplied in the task cannot be used because of the mis-match between Nora's language and that expected by the task, for example, "television addict".

First, student-teachers analyze the text from the point of view of genre, drawing on their knowledge of language to appreciate how Nora successfully manages aspects of the task, for example, creating coherence and writing dialogue. Second, student-teachers assess the difficulties revealed in Nora's writing and determine that it is affected by the colloquial variety of English spoken in Singapore (Gupta, 1994) rather than school language, for example, her spelling of the past tense. Furthermore, when student-teachers contrast Nora's home language of Malay with English, they determine that the spelling strategies she applies may be from her knowledge of writing in Malay and cause her to use spelling by sound strategies more than applying the spelling rules which would make her writing more efficient and accurate in English. Third, students begin to 'think like teachers' in their analysis of the materials as they realize that Nora is unable to access the potential scaffolding in the helping words given for the task, which, it seems, she is unable to read.

One unanticipated benefit of the case method was that as a few samples of children's reading and writing were employed throughout this course, they became points of contextualised reference and conceptual anchor points within the course. As each case built on the next, student-teachers came to understand the processes of children's development of English in Singapore. Through careful analysis, reflection, and contrastive linguistics, they realised similarities in the children's experiences. For example, by taking into account the difficulties both Jason and Nora have with tense in English, students appreciated how children in Singapore approach the complex task of learning English in relation to other languages. Student-teachers also reflected on the idea that an individual child's writing development and consequent instruction might not be neatly categorised according to the textbooks, especially when it is an aspect of multilingual development. Their experience of the cases of Nora and Jason, among others, made evident that teacher expertise and professional knowledge of both theory and practice is needed to read an individual child's writing and so plan appropriate instruction to develop each child's potential.

Thus, student-teachers' discussion of the cases shows them taking the opportunities provided by the examples and the guiding questions to apply observational, analytic, and reflective skills to relate observations of practice to their theoretical knowledge of reading and writing processes and children's linguistic development in English and other languages. Thus, they make theory/practice links through the experiences provided by the cases which act as a context for both theory and practice (Merseth, 1999). How self-aware student-teachers are of these learning processes and how far the case method achieves the aim of developing values can be best seen in a thematic analysis of student-teachers' reflections discussed in the next section.

Table 4. Student-teachers' reflections by theme

Themes	*Sub themes*	*Frequency*
context		**33**
	local	11
	authentic	12
	holistic	1
learning		**19**
	relevant	7
	effective	6
	enable reflection	1
	interesting/engaging	3
	practical	2
theory		**12**
	link appropriate theory	8
	specific theories mentioned	4
practice		**13**
	teaching strategies mentioned	5
	practice	2
	future orientation to the classroom/profession	6
children		**10**
	insight into children	2
	children's individual needs	3
	children's linguistic diversity	5

Table 5. Terms used by student-teachers to refer to the children of the sample cases

Cases	Terms used	Frequency
personalized		**21**
	pupils	1
	children	9
	students	4
	the pseudonyms	5
	Singaporean children/kids	2
non-personalized		**3**
	the examples/ samples	3

Findings: Student-teachers' Reflections on the Pedagogy

At the end of the course, one group of 19 student-teachers were invited to complete an open-ended survey to reflect on their learning experiences using the case-method pedagogy. All consented to the anonymous use of their written responses. The students were all very positive about the pedagogy in their reflections, within which emerged themes centring on their own learning, the local context, the application of theory to practice, professionalism, and the experience of children. These are shown in Table 4.

Discussion

First, the survey data showed student-teachers reflecting on their own learning, providing evidence for researchers' opinions that the use of the case method would prompt relfection through discussion (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Merseth, 1996; Shulman, 1996). In general, comments were that this pedagogy "felt different" and "had a bigger impact." Students wrote about enjoyment and interest, while some noted their improved learning and motivation because the examples were "relevant and meaningful." The quotations below by Daisy and Valerie show students' attention to and awareness of their learning in the processes of understanding, connecting, relating, and analysing.

> *In the textbook, it is very general and of overseas context, thus some of the points we won't be able to apply it in our local context. Thus, by using a local children text, I am able to connect and relate it better which will help and benefit my future teaching career.* (Daisy)

> *This learning was definitely different from textbook examples. Being given a chance to do analysis of these real-life examples has helped me to remember learning points more easily. Using the text samples also allow for the application of theories and concepts which help in content retention too.* (Valerie)

See also Brian below.

Second, there were, in total, 33 mentions of the contextualisation provided by the cases (Twiselton, 2006; Arlin, 1999; Collinson, 1999). This was, therefore, a significant feature for student-teachers. They commented on the localisation, immediacy, and authenticity, often using the adjective "real", for instance, "real-world", real-life", "real issues", and "real children." The quotations show the student-teachers' perception of the beneficial effect of the contextualisation on their learning. They were positive about the textbooks used but pointed out the limitations in exemplifying the theory/practice connection, preferring local, relevant examples. However, this preference in itself is a useful finding as it does show that student-teachers were becoming aware that theories and practices with children's language and literacy development demonstrated in alternative settings have to be reflected upon, evaluated, and adapted before they are adopted in order to teach appropriately in this socio-cultural and policy context of Singapore.

> *I've learned that spoken language is the foundation of language and has a huge influence on the way Singaporean kids write. The learning has a bigger impact on me than by means of the textbook as I can relate more to the local context.* (Patrick)

> *The writing about Haikel, Sue, and Esther and the reading of Griffin the school cat were very relevant to our course, especially because they are real-life examples. Furthermore, they are authentic data produced by Singaporean children, so in that sense it is very contextualised for our learning. This is much better than the examples given in the course texts because the course texts do not provide examples of Singaporean children, which would have been good exposure to us as we are going to be teachers of Singaporean children in the future.* (Elizabeth)

Third, 12 student-teachers took the contextualisation as a starting point to mentioned theory and the opportunities provided by the cases to apply theoretical knowledge to the examples of children's reading and writing (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Shulman, 1996). An example is provided by Zubaidah.

> *Although the textbook has a lot of content, I feel the examples are definitely meaningful in showing how students in Singapore write/ read. The examples are actual examples and their use is encouraged for student-teachers to better comprehend reading/ writing abilities. I feel it makes learning more holistic than just the textbook. And, we can use the theories from the textbook to apply to the examples.* (Zubaidah)

Some mentioned specific theories, illustrating superior learning of these theories when positioned in a context. They alluded to the stages of children's spelling development, theories of multilingualism, spoken language as foundational for children's development of literacy, and the influence of spoken language on spelling, all of which are concepts taught on the course.

Additionally, 13 students suggested that they were able to use the experiences provided by the case studies to connect to pedagogic theory, illustrating the bidirectional process noted by Darling-Hammond (2006) and Shulman (1996) of theory to practice and practice to theory links. Therefore, not only were student-teachers learning knowledge necessary for teaching in the multilingual primary school but they were becoming reflectively aware of the necessity of connecting theory with practical skills. Examples from the survey are:

> *The children's writing and reading aloud gave first-hand experience of what to expect in the classroom. it provided an opportunity to link theory to practice and reflect on ways to incorporate theory in the class.* (Michael)

> *Examples expose us to what to expect when we enter the teaching field. Examples provide us with the materials to understand and analyse concepts learnt in class. Explanations and discussion thereafter help consolidate thoughts and bring in theories.* (Brian)

> *They are real life examples and I find it good that we are able to analyse the writings and come up with strategies to help the students who wrote them. These examples are different to the ones in the textbook and they provide me with insights on how students in Singapore write.* (Atikah)

Some made explicit mention of teaching and assessment strategies examples, most often suggesting how these should be appropriate to the individual children of the cases confirmed by Mary and Catherine as stated below.

A fourth and unexpected finding was that in recognising the contextualisation of the cases, the student-teachers revealed a future orientation to their profession, apparently catalysing a professional disposition or identity (Lunenberg et al., 2007). The personalisation and contextualisation provided by the case method, therefore, suggests an effect on student-teachers' attitudes and seems likely to encourage the development of their ability to 'think like teachers' as well as the professional values considered necessary for the 21st century (NIE, 2009). One student wrote:

> *From these examples, I have learnt about real issues that I will face (and have to prepare myself for) in a typical classroom in a Singapore school. For instance, the fact that children are raised in a bilingual/ multilingual family and society will affect their use and learning of the English language in many ways. I have also learnt how I should take what I have learnt from readings and theories, then apply it to the multilingual/bilingual local context. This learning is different from the textbooks as the textbooks provide examples of children who are monolingual, which is probably quite rare in the current Singapore society as children have to learn at least two languages.* (Melissa)

The fifth finding concerns the way student-teachers reflected on their experiences of children gained through this approach. Given the situation in Singapore where student-teachers do not have much personal experiences with children, the terms they used to refer to the children of the cases shows how they personalised and "imagined" children. Only three students referred to the cases in the abstract without any personal reference; the others used the children's pseudonyms, indicating a personal connection, terms such as pupils or students, referencing education, and children and kids, recognising a specific stage of life. When writing about the children in their responses to the survey, some student-teachers also demonstrated a future orientation; one wrote about the "deep insight on prospective children" gained. Furthermore, they considered children's learning needs and wrote in terms of learning how to "help" with the learning issues pupils face. Some examples of their comments follow.

> *Haikel, Sue, Esther, and Griffin the school cat are very relevant to the local context. From these examples I learnt more about the issues that Singaporean children face in reading and writing.* (Deanna)

> *These examples are good such that they allow us to understand and have a clear idea of how different children write. They are very real-life examples. Textbooks are more theory-based.* (Wan Ting)

> *These examples give me an idea of how different students can be, even though they are at the same academic level, for example, primary one.* (Jing Wen)

> *I have learnt that different pupils have different learning needs and they have to be addressed properly with different methods of teaching. Through these examples I have a clearer idea of the typical ways in which pupils write and from there, try to think of strategies to improve on these respective areas. It is better for me to understand rather than just using examples from the textbooks as the examples are authentic and more relevant to the Singapore context.* (Mary)

> *From Haikel, Sue, and Esther's examples, I learnt about their stages of spelling development, the common mistakes children make in their writing, as well as strategies I could use to help them with their learning gaps.* (Catherine)

Some student-teachers specifically commented on linguistic diversity, illustrated by Melissa's comment above. Their recognition of pupil diversity and needs coupled with a future orientation suggest an emerging confidence in their roles and abilities as teachers with the subsequent emergence of the belief that all children can learn (NIE, 2009)

Thus, students' comments show evidence of their appreciation of diversity and their commitment to nurturing the potential in each child according to their individual needs through appropriate instruction. However, apart from valuing of diversity and commitment to nurturing children's potential, it is not clear from their reflections what other values and dispositions student-teachers are developing or whether, in fact, they are being developed at all through the process of the pedagogy. It seems as if the reflections show an awareness of the more 'practical' values of the recognition of diversity and nurturing children's potential and little evidence of the more "emotional" values of empathy (Shulman, 1992). Perhaps student-teachers find it appropriate to call on professional identities rather than personal ones (Lunenberg et al., 2007) It is possible that students did not discuss ethics in their reflections because values were not foregrounded explicitly during the course; rather, they were expected to inform a standpoint and judged to be there if the appropriate view was evident during class. As a result of this type of teaching students might not have the professional vocabulary with which to discuss values as (Lunenberg et al., 2007). It is equally possible that feelings such as empathy, while intense when experienced, diminish and thus, students had forgotten them by the time of the survey. It is important to establish through future research how far morals may be absorbed merely through participatory experiences, example, and reflection or whether explicit teaching is necessary to contextualise values as well as theory and practice. It may be that different values, attitudes, and dispositions require different teaching approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has found how the situated design and implementation of a case-method pedagogic intervention was effective in enabling student-teachers to learn the knowledge and skills of teaching reading and writing in the lower primary school in multilingual Singapore. These knowledge and skills include reflective, evaluative, and analytic skills (Arlin, 1999; Berg 2010; Collinson, 1999; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Twiselton 2006) as well as knowledge of language and contrastive linguistics (Bernhardt, 1994; Koda, 2005).

In addition, most significantly, it was shown that the contextualisation achieved by using the case-method pedagogy enabled student-teachers to make links from theory to practice and vice versa (Cheng et al, 2012; Allen 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Liston et al, 2006; Shulman, 1996) through reflection and discussion. In their reflections, student-teachers showed awareness of positive effects of the pedagogy on their learning; they valued making the links between theory and practice, policy, and social educational context for their learning and their professional futures. From the perspective of course design, the use of multiple cases throughout the course had the unexpected, added benefit of providing conceptual anchor points which could be referenced in teaching. The study also showed how the use of cases can make international teaching materials relevant to a local setting and therefore how to make the best use of the valued aspects of imported textbooks.

For student-teachers, the personalisation of children achieved through the details of cases was just as important as the localisation and just as effective pedagogically. All except three student-teachers imagined children and thought in terms of increasing understanding of them. Student-teachers recognised children's diverse needs and stated a commitment to nurturing their potential through the use of appropriate teaching strategies (NIE, 2009). Concomitant was their belief that all children can learn (NIE, 2009), which was demonstrated through their increased understanding of the multilingual environment and the effects of a spoken home mother-tongue language on children's learning of English. These two beliefs appeared to be supported by confidence in their developing professionalism. This was observed in their future-orientation to the profession, another unanticipated benefit of the pedagogy. Students, however, did not show empathetic feelings in their reflections beyond their mention of deep insights and a desire to help children in their learning. This is although they had the

opportunity to acquire the values and dispositions of teaching through guiding question number three.

The pedagogic recommendations of the study are that the case-method approach can be a very effective means of teacher education when implemented with opportunities for discussion and recommendation. Cases have to be carefully selected in order to achieve contextualization and personalization. They can be placed in a conceptual sequence at significant points in a course to increase their positive effects. Cases could be used more widely, but it is acknowledged that all aspects of selection, design, and implementation are more time-consuming than lecturing or reading a textbook section. Moving forward, future research on pedagogies for teacher education could include the case method, in particular, how cases may be designed to assist student-teachers in developing the more "emotional" values linked to personal identities. This kind of research may also find the appropriate metalanguage which would greatly assist in the reflection and discussion process of values clarification.

More broadly, this research into the process of design, implementation, and reflection on a situated case-method pedagogy for the education of teachers of English may provide a framework for other multilingual societies. The research has shown the relevance of international educational theorising and practice for pedagogy, but it has also shown how this may be applied in consideration of the particular socio-cultural, linguistic, textual and educational features of a local context through the case method.

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