

# EL Classroom *inquiry*

It is about what works in the English Language classroom





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# Contents

4

**An Inquiry into the Place of Pre-Assessment in Differentiated Instruction**

Unity Secondary School

12

**An Inquiry into the Teaching of Coherence in Writing**

Da Qiao Primary School

20

**Taking Ownership of Revision in Writing**

Tanjong Katong Primary School



## An Inquiry into the Place of Pre-Assessment in Differentiated Instruction

BY DANIEL TEO  
(UNITY SECONDARY SCHOOL)  
AND SOLASTRI SUYOT (ELIS)

Daniel Teo, a teacher at Unity Secondary School, believes that all students can learn, in their own ways and in their own time. To teach the vast diversity of learners in his English Language classroom, he adapts Differentiated Instruction (DI). He groups his students by common academic needs and gives them choices for class assignments and conducts mini-lessons for students who struggle with a skill. This inquiry marks the start of Daniel's journey into the intentional use of DI. He and Master Teacher/English Language, Solastri Suyot, explored how they could intentionally differentiate the teaching of narratives for a Secondary 1 Normal (Academic) blended Subject Based Banding class.

# An Inquiry into the Place of Pre-Assessment in Differentiated Instruction



## Introduction

In 2017, I was deployed to teach a Secondary 1 Normal (Academic) [N(A)] blended Subject Based Banding (SBB) class and appointed as a mentor to a group of teachers from SBB Phase 1 schools. The blended class consisted of 18 students who were from Sec 1N(A) and 12 students from Sec 1Normal (Technical). I have always believed that all students can learn, in their own ways and in their own time and I thought that this was an opportune time for me to apply what I had learnt at the Differentiated Instruction (DI) workshop conducted by the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) in 2016.

I decided to apply my learning when designing a unit of work at the beginning of Term 1. The lesson unit focused on using language for the purpose of telling stories. By the end of the lesson unit, the students were expected to produce a short story. I decided to focus on helping the students understand the concept of plot structure, that is, orientation, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

At the DI workshop, we had been reminded to “think big but start small”. With that in mind, I decided to

implement just two of the practices of differentiated instruction: the principle of flexible grouping and the principle of choice. I placed my students in groups that varied over the course of the unit, to give them the opportunity to learn from different peers. I also gave my students several writing prompts to choose from for their writing assignment on narratives, instead of assigning only one choice for all students.

I was disappointed, however, when I analysed my students’ stories. I realised that a number of students were still unclear about the plot structure of narratives. Some had no strong plot while others did not develop the conflict. It became apparent to me that the use of the above two principles and practices of DI had not facilitated learning for all the groups of learners in my SBB class. Reflecting on this, I asked myself if there were gaps in my understanding of the principles and practices of Differentiated Instruction. This led me to approach Ms Solastri Suyot, Master Teacher/ EL, for support. Solastri posed me a question which got me thinking – “*What kind of pre-assessment did you conduct to determine your learners’ readiness/ needs for the lesson?*” Stumped, I realised that I needed to re-visit the theoretical underpinnings of DI and strengthen my understanding of DI.

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## Learning from Literature Review

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I was guided in my inquiry by the extensive work and research done by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson on DI. DI is defined by Tomlinson (2013) as “an approach to teaching that advocates active planning for and attention to student differences in classrooms, in the context of high quality curriculums”. In addition, Tomlinson (2005) also strongly encourages the use of formative assessment as the primary tool for informing DI practices. For effective instruction, the teacher must use pre-assessment to make decisions, become what Tomlinson (2003) terms “assessment junkies” (p.9), collecting data and using the data to rationalise adjustments made to content, processes and products. Pre-assessment, prior to teaching a unit of study, enables teachers to base pedagogic decisions on data and not on intuition.

Reviewing the literature pertaining to DI was an eye opener for me. The key phrase that jumped out at me from Tomlinson’s definition was “active planning”. I realised that when I had grouped my students for the lesson unit on narratives in Term 1, and given them choices for their writing assignment, I had done it intuitively, without any thoughtful planning before I started on the unit. I had not based my decision on any data. I also did not have a strategy as to how I would provide support for the various groups of learners in my class. All I had done was to put them into groups and assign them the tasks.



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## Applying My Learning

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The opportunity to apply my new understanding came in Semester 2 when I had to re-visit the lesson unit on narratives as revision before the end-of-the-year examinations. This time, Solastri co-planned the teaching of narratives with me. Solastri suggested that we start by using two learning activities, the ‘Know, Want to Know, Learned’ (K-W-L) and the ‘Story Auction’ game, to begin this lesson unit, as a means of establishing how well the students understood the elements of a narrative. These activities would serve as pre-assessment to help us make informed pedagogical decisions for differentiated instruction.



## Our Lesson Plan

### Lesson Duration: 1 h

Reading and Viewing LO3: Apply critical reading and viewing by focusing on implied meaning, higher order thinking, judgement and evaluation

SSAB: Compare different types of texts (e.g., literary versus expository, narrative versus factual recount) based on general or specific given criteria

ACoLADE:

- Guide students to discover what makes a narrative through a game that requires them to identify narrative texts.
- Explicitly teach the main elements of a narrative.

SN	Learning Experience	Rationale
1	Teacher writes on the board: Today we are learning to identify elements of a narrative.	To set clear learning focus.
2	a. Teacher asks students for their understanding of narratives by filling in the 'K' column of their K-W-L chart. b. Teacher asks students what they want to know about narratives by filling in the 'W' column of their K-W-L chart.	To activate students' prior knowledge of narratives (since they had been taught narratives in Term 1 as well as when they were in primary school). Students are also encouraged to think about what they want to learn about narratives.
3	Teacher conducts the 'Story Auction' game <sup>1</sup> .	To assess students' understanding of narratives and application of their understanding to evaluate the texts.
4	Teacher reviews by getting students to explain why some texts in the 'Story Auction' game are narratives while others are not.	To reinforce and consolidate key concepts: "setting", "characters", "plot", and "theme".
5	Teacher explicitly teaches the elements of a narrative (setting, characters, plot and theme) using one of the narratives.	To model for students how to identify the elements of a narrative using a Story Map Graphic Organiser.
6	Students revisit their K-W-L chart on Narratives and fill in column 'L'.	To provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning.
7	Teacher consolidates the lesson by getting students to share what they have written in column 'L' of their K-W-L chart.	To re-visit and reinforce what has been learned.
8	Teacher collects students' K-W-L charts and ends the lesson by giving students a sneak preview of the next lesson.	To prepare students for the next lesson.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of the 'Story Auction' game, refer to *All About English Teacher's Resource Package Secondary 1 Express Unit 2: Using Language for the Purpose of Telling Stories*, p.41-42.

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## Reflections

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The K-W-L strategy and the 'Story Auction' game were effective in helping my students review and revise their understanding of the elements of a narrative. The students' K-W-L charts showed me that their understanding of the elements of a narrative was uneven: some students were confident in identifying the elements of a narrative and used appropriate metalanguage such as "setting", "characters", "plot" and "theme"; others were not able to articulate their understanding.

During the 'Story Auction' game, even the quieter students participated by agreeing or disagreeing with the team's decisions. While the majority of the students were able

to justify why some texts were narratives and others were not, it became evident from the 'Story Auction' game that several students still had misconceptions about the elements of a narrative which led them to bid for non-narrative types of texts.

This lesson affirmed for me the need for pre-assessment to determine the level of readiness of students before planning how to differentiate the instruction. I used my students' responses in their K-W-L chart as well as my observations of the interactions and decisions made by the groups during the 'Story Auction' game to plan meaningful learning experiences for Lesson 2 that would strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the organisational structure in narratives.





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## Moving Forward

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Prior to this collaboration with Solastri, I had felt confident that I had been applying the principles and practices of DI in my daily classroom teaching. For example, when enacting a unit of lessons, I would modify the resources, adjust the way I teach or vary how my students would demonstrate their learning. I have learnt, however, that this is unintentional DI.

In intentional DI, pre-assessment is key, as it informs the teacher's decisions at the lesson preparation stage. In her book, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, Tomlinson (2014) points out that pre-assessment informs the teacher's understanding of students' proximity to a unit's learning outcomes. The data gathered from the pre-assessment gives the teacher a sense of the range of needs in the class relative to the learning outcomes before a unit begins. In intentional DI, the teacher can expect that some students will struggle while others will exceed expectations, so prior to instruction, the

teacher should have a plan in place to provide support for all groups of learners. Thus, it is essential that during pre-assessment, students' current levels of readiness are assessed accurately, so that appropriate and meaningful learning experiences can then be designed to help all students achieve the learning outcomes.

Through this classroom inquiry experience with Solastri I have realised that a grounded knowledge and understanding of the profiles of our learners is necessary for flexible grouping to be effective. I have observed that group dynamics and the way my students interact with one another in a team setting could affect the quality of learning that takes place, regardless of how well designed the differentiated task was.

My exploration into DI has only just started. With the implementation of SBB in secondary schools, and the need to create more learner-centred learning experiences, differentiated instruction is no longer an option. Moving forward, I intend to apply my learning in my other classes and invite my colleagues from the EL Department to form a Professional Learning Team to understand DI better.



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age 6

el only

- matching of pictures

looked at colours, different pictures

worked separately but combined their pictures

used pictures as **clues** to make sense.

good flow → correct order → make sense

COHERENCE

A GOAL  
without a  
PLAN  
is just a  
wish

IF YOU SPEAK  
1 0 0 3  
WIKI  
HELPFUL?  
SPEAKING?  
NECESSARY?  
END?

THE SECRET  
TO GETTING  
AHEAD  
IS GETTING  
STARTED

## An Inquiry into the Teaching of Coherence in Writing

BY SRIVIDHYA MOHAN  
(DA QIAO PRIMARY SCHOOL) AND  
KALPANA BALASUBRAMANIAM (ELIS)

Ms Srividhya Mohan, a teacher in Da Qiao Primary School, found it a challenge to teach her Primary 3 students the skill of writing with coherence. Srividhya approached Mrs Kalpana Balasubramaniam, Master Teacher/ English Language, who was attached to the school and together they explored how they could help the young writers in Srividhya's class.



## Introduction

Use jigsaw puzzles to teach English? How is it even possible to make something abstract like 'coherence' into something concrete that 9-year olds can understand? These were the questions in my mind when I talked to Kalpana, the Master Teacher who was attached to my school.

In 2017, I was teaching a Primary 3 class of mixed progress level students. Although the children had been writing short pieces since Primary 1, they were just starting to write full compositions, so I wanted them to start right. However, I soon realised that my students needed a great deal of guidance from me. They struggled with idea generation and found it difficult to link one idea to another. They could only complete the writing task with extensive support.

When I shared my concerns with Kalpana, she asked me if the children knew what 'coherence in writing' looked like. I realised then that while I had been concerned about the gaps in my students' writing, I had not paused to wonder if my students even understood what I meant by those 'gaps'. I started paying more attention to my students' work and realised that my students were in what Piaget referred to as the Concrete Operational Stage of Cognitive Development (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2018). They needed a learning experience that would help them understand the abstract concept of 'coherence' before they would be able to demonstrate it in their writing. As young learners, they needed to have clarity about what they were required to do and Kalpana suggested that the experience of piecing jigsaw puzzles together could be what my students needed.

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## Teaching Coherence

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I invited Kalpana to co-teach with me. During the first lesson which she conducted, Kalpana grouped my students in quartets. Each group was given a jigsaw puzzle and tasked to put the pieces together and form the complete picture within five minutes.

The task required the students to interact, negotiate, give directions and suggest alternatives. While working together to complete the jigsaw puzzle, the students needed to rethink assumptions, as new information such as patterns of colours became available. They also needed cognitive flexibility (Understood.org, 2018) to adjust their initial ideas.

Kalpana conducted a post-activity debrief to encourage the students to talk about the learning experience. The students talked about how they had used clues such as colours or parts of the picture to put the puzzle together. They explained how some pieces needed to be moved around and spoke about their realisation that when pieced together wrongly, the final picture was incomplete or distorted. This was the 'aha!' moment we had been waiting for! Kalpana led the students to see that the jigsaw pieces were like parts of the story in their writing. Just like the clues they had used to form the pictures, readers of their writing needed clues to understand how the different parts of their story were linked. When the parts were not put in the right order, just like the jigsaw puzzle, their writing would not come out right. This 'right order of ideas' which helped the piece of writing come together well was 'coherence'.

I conducted the next lesson. I re-visited the experience of putting together the jigsaw puzzles to reinforce the learning and the students' understanding of 'coherence'. I then gave the students envelopes with parts of a story cut into chunks. I explained that this was a jigsaw puzzle with words and they had to arrange the chunks into a meaningful sequence of events. Just as they had done before with the jigsaw pieces, my students worked collaboratively to complete the activity. When asked about the learning experience after the completion of the activity, I was excited to hear them use phrases such as "matching ideas", "flow of the story" and "making sense" when describing how they pieced the stories together. I recorded these phrases on the board and explained that these aspects had created 'coherence' in writing and made the story sensible.

These two lessons made subsequent lessons on content development easier and more fruitful because the students had greater clarity on how to form a cohesive piece of writing. I continued to strengthen their understanding of 'coherence' by teaching cohesive devices such as linking words and backward referencing that my students could use to link their ideas better. The cohesive devices were compared to the clues the students had used to fit the jigsaw pieces and story chunks together. This whole exercise led to a better learning experience when my students were revising their writing as well. The students were able to see how re-arranging portions of their writing made their stories clearer. They better understood the importance of using cues such as repetition of words and ideas to help the reader make sense of what a piece of writing was all about. All this through piecing jigsaw puzzles together!



## Lesson Outline on Coherence

Duration: 55 minutes

Class: Primary 3

Resources: 5 sets of picture jigsaws, 5 sets of chunked passages.

Formative Assessment Strategies: sharing and clarifying learning intentions, effective questioning

Learning outcomes: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- 1) understand what coherence is
- 2) identify ways to improve coherence in a text

Stages	Activities and Teacher Language (TL)
Tuning In activity (5 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Using an example of poor writing, elicit responses from students on what makes a good composition. Suggested questions: <i>What do you think of this piece of writing? Why do you say that?</i> <i>How can we improve this?</i></li><li>2. Record the responses from the students on the white board and tell them we will revisit this later in the lesson.</li></ol>
Lesson Development: Introduction of Coherence (15 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Tell students that they will be piecing together a jigsaw puzzle.</li><li>4. Let students work on the puzzles.</li><li>5. Walk around to ensure students are working together to complete their jigsaw puzzle.</li><li>6. Once the groups are done, gather the students in front to share their experiences on completing the task. Suggested questions: <i>How did you form the picture?</i> <i>How did you know that your pieces were fixed correctly?</i> <i>What strategies did you use to solve this task?</i> <i>Do you think you could have completed the picture if one piece had been missing? Why?</i> <i>How did you know where each piece fitted?</i></li><li>7. Record responses from students on the board.</li><li>8. Lead the discussion to introduce the idea of how one piece joins another in a sensible manner.</li><li>9. Introduce the word 'coherence' and the importance of it in writing.</li><li>10. Direct students back to the tuning-in activity responses. Invite them to compare their experience of connecting jigsaw pieces to their earlier comments on the example of poor writing. Lead them to see the importance of coherence in writing.</li></ol>
Lesson Development: Building on the concept of Coherence (30 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>11. Inform students of their second task which is to rearrange parts of a passage to form a coherent text.</li><li>12. Walk around to ensure the students are working together to complete their jigsaw passage.</li></ol>

Stages	Activities and Teacher Language (TL)
	<p>13. Once the groups are done, gather the students in front to share their experiences on completing the task. Suggested questions:  <i>Did you enjoy this task? Was this easier than the previous task? Why?</i>  <i>How did you know which paragraph came first?</i>  <i>What were some of the clues you used to help you?</i></p> <p>14. Record responses from students on the board.</p> <p>15. Compare their responses to the jigsaw puzzle activity to their responses to the jigsaw passage activity. Point out similarities and lead the discussion to the concept of coherence.</p> <p>16. Get students to identify/list ways to show coherence in their text.</p> <p>17. Get groups to present their passages and explain the rationale behind the chosen order of chunked passages.</p>
Consolidation (10 minutes)	<p>18. Consolidate the lesson by highlighting key points of coherence and how to ensure coherence in their own writing. Relook at the earlier example of poor writing and ask students to comment on it again, using the new knowledge they have gained.</p>





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## Personal Reflections

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This inquiry into my classroom practice has been very beneficial to my professional growth. During the post-lesson discussions, Kalpana and I talked about what went well and what could have been done better. This helped me refine my teaching actions for subsequent lessons. I also have a better understanding of the teaching processes and language learning principles advocated in the English Language Syllabus 2010. I understand, for example, the importance of contextualising students' learning, crafting learner-centred activities and enabling the application of learning.

My first takeaway from this journey of inquiry is the need to make the abstract as concrete as possible for young learners. Although the activity of piecing together a jigsaw puzzle was a simple one, the ensuing discussion on how the students decided on which piece went where while solving the puzzle helped my students understand the meaning of 'coherence'.

In addition, I reflected on the type of questions I used to ask and how I could ask more effective questions. For example, instead of close ended questions like "Have you travelled by bus before? Where did you go?" I moved to asking more probing questions such as "How did you find the experience? What would have made it better?" Such open-ended questions helped my students tap deeper into their own experiences and this enabled them to generate more ideas. The questions also encouraged my students to think more about details and this enhanced the quality of their writing. I also found that my students were more engaged and attentive during lessons and eager with their responses.

I have also come to recognise the importance of making my lessons fun and creating meaningful learning experiences for my students. This inquiry has benefitted not only me but also the other teachers at my level as I have shared what I have learnt from Kalpana with them.



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## Moving Forward

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Moving forward, I would like to attend more courses on teaching writing to expand my repertoire of ideas on how to teach writing more effectively. I will consciously look at how I can build the knowledge bases that support my pedagogic practices. This will help me develop the skills I need to teach writing in a way that will help my students become better writers. Although writing is a dreaded task for many students and a challenge to teach for many teachers, I now feel more confident that I can teach writing effectively.



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## Taking Ownership of Revision in Writing

BY ANISSA FERDAUS,  
WANG SEOW HUEY, ASLINDA HAMID,  
ROSLINAH JUNALI, LAI SIEW CHAN,  
YAP HUI LING, FARHANA OSMAN,  
DINESH THASAMARASINGAM  
(TANJONG KATONG PRIMARY SCHOOL)  
AND SOO KIM BEE (ELIS)

Anissa Ferdous, Head of Department/ English Language (HOD/EL) of Tanjong Katong Primary School and her team of upper primary English Language (EL) teachers explored how they could help their students take ownership of their writing and act on feedback to improve their writing. Working together with Mrs Soo Kim Bee, Master Teacher/ English Language (MT/EL), Anissa and her team formed a Professional Learning Team to inquire into the teaching of revision skills for writing through the use of the S.T.A.R. framework.



### Introduction

The teachers in the English Language (EL) Department have long been aware of the different types of feedback as well as the importance of giving feedback. However, a common issue we found was that the teachers' written comments were too general. The teachers were also not certain about what constituted effective feedback that would move the students' writing forward. The students, on the other hand, were not clear about how to make use of their teachers' questions and comments to revise their drafts.

In 2015, the EL Department decided to tackle this important issue of giving feedback on students' writing

through professional development. The EL teachers teaching Primary 3 to Primary 6 classes attended a 5-module Professional Learning Programme (PLP) entitled "Budding Writers, Exploring Writing" conducted by Mrs Soo Kim Bee, MTT/ EL. During the PLP, Kim Bee encouraged the teachers to try out the strategies learnt from the PLP in their own classrooms and to share their experience during subsequent sessions. The teachers of each level also developed lesson plans for all teachers at the level to try, and wrote their reflections after each attempt. This arrangement allowed all the EL teachers to be familiar with the same processes for teaching writing and for rich conversations to take place regarding the teaching of writing.

## Our Inquiry Project

Following the PLP, a small team of Primary 5 and Primary 6 teachers worked closely with Kim Bee to form a Professional Learning Team (PLT) to inquire into how we could help our students to revise their writing. The PLT decided to focus on the Primary 5 students and explore how they could provide the students with a systematic way to revise their writing. The team wanted the students to acquire the skills of self-reflection and learn how to use feedback from peers and the teacher to improve their writing. The team also wanted to build a culture of collaboration in the classroom and ensure that the students would be able to independently apply the skills of revising in their writing.

The team's reading of relevant literature on the teaching of writing established for them that the task of writing was a complex process. They also established that it was essential for the students to learn the skills of planning, drafting, revising and editing their own written pieces before the 'final' submission. The teachers began to understand that the writing process needed to be seen not as a linear process, but as an iterative and interactive one between the writer and the reader. It was

also essential that the students themselves see the task of revising their writing as a necessary step to improve their own writing.

The teachers also realised that for feedback to be effective, feedback should

- be given to students during the writing process and not after they had completed the writing
- direct students on how to do the task
- encourage self-regulation by the students and
- be directed specifically to the needs of each child to enable him to progress as an individual (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

As a result of their reading and team conversations, the teachers came to the conclusion that student writing will be enhanced when teachers:

- provide explicit instruction of the writing process (generating and organising ideas, revising and editing)
- allow students to take ownership of their writing
- make use of collaborative learning strategies such as brainstorming, creating group concept maps and online discussion forums to encourage the generation of ideas during group work.



## A. Explicit instruction of the writing process

In this inquiry, the PLT drew on the approach to teaching writing described by Kelly Gallagher in his book 'Teaching Adolescent Writers' (2006). To help the students to communicate their ideas effectively, the team decided to focus on teaching the craft of reviewing and revising writing. The teachers introduced the elements of writing craft and editing to their classes to establish the skills the students needed to write effectively, as seen in Table 1.

The teachers also encouraged the students to focus on what they wanted to say and how they wanted to say it first, without being so bogged down by the mechanics of writing that they were held back in their idea generation and the expression of their thoughts in writing. It was only when the students started editing (for grading or publishing) that they were encouraged to look at the items in the column, "Elements of Editing".

**Table 1: List of Craft and Editing Elements (Gallagher 2006, p. 144)**

Elements of Craft	Elements of Editing
strong voice	sentence boundaries
sentence sense & variety	run-on sentences
word power (vocabulary, use of metaphors/show not tell)	fragments common errors
use of strong verbs	subject-verb agreement
paragraphing for effect	pronoun agreement
effective introductions/conclusions	pronoun vagueness
flow (sequence/coherence)	word choice
development/complexity of ideas	spelling
effective transitions	punctuation
special narrative strategies (flashbacks, time shifts etc.)	use of numbers italics
strong dialogue	capitalisation

## B. Students' Ownership of Writing

The large class sizes made it difficult for the teachers to meet with individual students for conferencing and to give detailed feedback on every piece of writing by every student. Recognising the importance of students taking ownership for revising their own writing, the PLT explored how they could equip the students with the skills of self-assessment and peer-assessment to enable them to review and revise their writing drafts to enhance relevance, focus and clarity. The team decided to adopt

the S.T.A.R. framework (Gallagher, 2006) as a guide for students, as its suggested actions – substitute, take away, add, rearrange - are congruent with the skills of revision described in the EL Syllabus, that is, to "replace, add, delete and substitute, reorder words, phrases or sentences, facts, ideas and descriptive details or points of view to effectively address the writer's purpose, the needs of the audience, and the context of their writing" (p. 71, Skills, Strategies, Attitudes and Behaviour (SSAB) for writing, EL Syllabus 2010).

Using sample pieces of writing from the students' work, the teachers modelled how students could substitute less effective vocabulary, add ideas, take out irrelevant information and rearrange ideas and words for more effective writing. The teachers used 'Think Aloud' to demonstrate the processes of revising so that the students could see how revising could improve writing.

The S.T.A.R. framework was also used by the teachers during conferencing. The teachers first used the Six +1 Traits of Writing (Culham, 2003) to describe the

qualities of good writing and showed the students samples of writing demonstrating the 6 Traits. The teachers then used the 6 Traits of Writing rubrics and gave the students exemplars illustrating different levels of performance. During teacher-led conferencing, the teachers encouraged the students to explain in their own words the expectations of the rubrics and to what extent their own writing matched the expectations. The S.T.A.R. framework was then used in tandem with the rubrics to guide the students in revising their writing and in giving feedback to one another as peer resources.

**Fig 1. Example of student's writing revised using S.T.A.R.**

Original Text	Revised Text
<p>In my old, battered, black wallet, I carry many things. A letter from a friend. A two-dollar note. My identity card. ( T ) Many other cards and items as well. There is one thing however, which I prize above all my possessions. It is a photograph. This photograph was taken two years ago with my best friend, Christine. ( A )</p> <p>Christine was a kind and friendly person, but she have some shortcomings. She is very weak in math and ( S ) often does not get good results for several math paper, her mother also reprimand her whenever she gets an A, B, C D or E. What I remember is that her mother said that she has to get A plus for all the subjects! This picture was taken the day before she transferred to another school, ( R ) it reminds me of : time we quarrelled. ( T )</p>	<p>In my old, battered, black wallet, I carry many things. A letter from a friend. A two-dollar note. My identity card. There is one thing in it, however, which I prize above all my possessions. It is a photograph. Taken two years ago, this photograph is the only one I have of me and my best friend, Christine. It was taken the day before she transferred to another school.</p> <p>Christine was kind and friendly but she had her shortcomings. She was very weak in Maths and often did badly for her Math papers. In fact, her mother would reprimand her, whatever her grade - A, B, C D or E. What I remembered most clearly, was that her mother always insisted that she scored nothing less than an A-plus for all her subjects!</p>

### C. Collaborative Learning

In this inquiry, the PLC Team also sought to encourage collaborative learning through group work. To better engage and motivate the students to collaborate and co-create their group writing, the students were asked to upload their Draft 1 on TitanPad or Google Docs

for selected lesson cycles so that the writing could be shared for collective response and revision using S.T.A.R. The S.T.A.R. framework gave the students a means of reviewing their own writing as well as responding to the work of their peers.

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## Our Reflections

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The experience of inquiring into the teaching of revising skills was a very positive one for the teachers as well as for the students. The teachers have observed that the activities and tasks enhanced the students' ability to

generate ideas and organise ideas more effectively. The students realised that responding and revising could take place at any stage of the writing process and looked forward to responding and commenting on the work of their peers. The department has also continued with this project at the P4 level with a new PLC Team comprising Primary 4 EL teachers.



### **Anissa:**

As the Head of Department, I think that the best takeaway we have had from this collaboration with ELIS and inquiry into our practice is the professional growth of the teachers. Through the professional conversations with Kim Bee, and through reading professional literature, my department has become more aware of how to teach writing and how to give effective feedback that can help move students' writing forward. At the end of the day, I have a better, pedagogically stronger team of EL teachers. Having worked with Kim Bee, I am more convinced that a teacher leader needs to have a high level of dynamism and subject content knowledge (SCK) especially in exploring pedagogical ideas when driving the EL curriculum and leading the EL teachers in professional development.

### **Seow Huey:**

I was eager to try out the strategies introduced. Our professional conversations with Kim Bee and within the PLT have helped me to reflect on my own practice. For instance, while a teaching strategy may have been tried and tested by other practitioners, I am now more aware and confident about using these strategies in my teaching as well. I also tweak the strategy to suit my lesson if the need arises.

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ELiS

2 Malan Road, Blk P, Levels 1 & 2,  
Singapore 109433  
Tel: +65 6664 1724 Fax: +65 6278 7145  
Email: [moe\\_elis\\_academy@moe.gov.sg](mailto:moe_elis_academy@moe.gov.sg)  
Website: <http://www.elis.moe.edu.sg>