

## **The Singapore Tamil Classroom Challenge Teaching Strategies and Tamil Internet – Striking the Fine Balance**

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In Singapore Tamil is one of the Official Languages. As such, it is the recommended language to be taken in schools as a 2nd language by the Tamil speaking community. In the early years only a number of schools offered Tamil as a 2nd language but today across the island the number of Primary Schools offering Tamil as a 2nd Language has increased from 30% to 80%.

In the early years Tamil teachers in Singapore did not vary much from other language teachers as they all used the chalk and board method and it was solely a teacher centered learning circle whereby grammar was emphasized, compositions were stereotype and pupils attempted comprehension passage questions merely by lifting the answers from the passages. Students were merely bookworms for there was for neither analyzing or creative thinking. Now the 3 initiatives by Ministry of Education that are Information Technology, Thinking Skills & National Education

Over the years, the education system of Singapore has gone through many phases and has been revamped to one that focuses on intangibles like creativity and thought stimulation. With the emphasis placed on aspects such as creative and critical thinking, employment of innovative teaching strategies has proved to be one that is as mentally draining as is challenging. Some of the new teaching strategies adopted by the teachers currently involve students taking an active stand towards their own learning. To paraphrase a line from *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, students are no longer “ little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim” as they are no longer ‘pampered’ by spoon feeding.

The role of a teacher is multi-faceted and the demands just as extenuating. The aims of the Singapore Tamil Classroom Challenge is to revitalize teachers who are already exponents in the field with new vigor and enthusiasm. New Strategies injected into old modicums can create waves that will break into new horizons.

Teaching Tamil in the Tamil Classroom will now sail through previously impenetrable waters to gain wonderful insights and dimensions. We the teachers’ in the Singapore Tamil Classroom invite each and every Tamil enthusiast to partake in the intellectual and creative buffet of the tastefully thought of strategies and to allow them to pervade their senses. As a well known writer once said “ The stage has been set. Let the play begin”

Ways of using effective strategies using the internet to improve listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. An integrated approach to literacy development integrates reading, viewing, and writing with oral communication. Pupils should be able to talk about what they know as well as read about what they talk and write about what they know. In order to meet today's challenges the various materials are being retrieved from the Suitable Web page.

## **LEARNING VIA THE INTERNET**

In our curriculum pupils are provided various opportunities for listening, viewing, speaking and writing to aid our Tamil pupils to become competent in listening, reading, understand and express themselves with confidence, and write effectively in Tamil. Since the implementation of Information Technology in the Education System, Teachers in Singapore have been using IT in the teaching of Tamil language. IT based teaching and learning is one of our key strategies for equipping our pupils with thinking skills, learning skills and communication skills.

Besides CD ROMs internet based teaching has been widely practiced by many our teachers. The website created locally which is tailored for the local TL syllabus.

In today's classroom, students are given ample opportunities to express their own opinions through class discussion and look for information that they need through the means of books, CD- ROMs, magazines, newspapers and the Internet. In such a learning environment whereby the students are required to source the information on their own the Internet has indubitably an integral role in the students learning and naturally the Tamil Learning of students is not an exception. Tamil teachers have also gone out of the classrooms literally and figuratively to enter the world of Internet with the students as there are educational websites that promote Tamil learning. These websites catered to making Tamil an enjoyable subject are readily accessible and teachers of today are taking the liberty to incorporate new learning strategies that they have learnt with these readily accessible websites to make Tamil lessons that the students find interesting and fun. It is to be noted that teaching strategies is essential in web-assisted learning. This Paper will share some suggested strategies.

## **WEB BASED LEARNING STRATEGIES**

### **Vocabulary**

Many web pages offer vocabulary aid for Primary 1 onwards. Pupils get bored memorizing these synonyms. Teachers in the lower primary(P1 and P2) used the words from the web page and form a story using power point presentation and teach the pupils They also highlight the words they learn. When they are tested, they are able to remember the words. The Upper Primary pupils were given follow up activities such as sentence construction or even creative writing or story writing which the words learnt are used. They present their assignment in PowerPoint and written essays. It was noted that pupils participate with enthusiasm and learn to work as a team. The quality of their written work has shown improvement. They were able to write with confidence. Besides they also gain competency in their skills such as gathering and organizing of information and IT skills. There was sharp improvement in their memory of, synonyms.

**Grammar** : Teacher could bring pupils to the Computer Lab and do on line grammar lessons. For example – The pupils can log on to the same web page and then do the practice. The teacher then goes through the answer orally. The teacher flashes the key words and asks pupils to do a slide presentation

## Cloze Passage /Comprehension.

Teachers shows a selected passage from the web page. Pupils are then grouped into pairs and asked to do pictorial format for the lower primary and a Problem Solving Strategy for Upper Primary either in word document or in PowerPoint presentation. Each groups presentation will vary but the concept of learning is present here. Discussion among the pupils are done when each group do their presentation. At the end of the lesson pupils are able to answer the questions without any difficulty. This lesson is best conducted in the lab.

New learning strategies would include terms such as co-operative learning strategies, mind mapping, scamper and KWL . Under these methods students brain storm, discuss and share knowledge with one another.

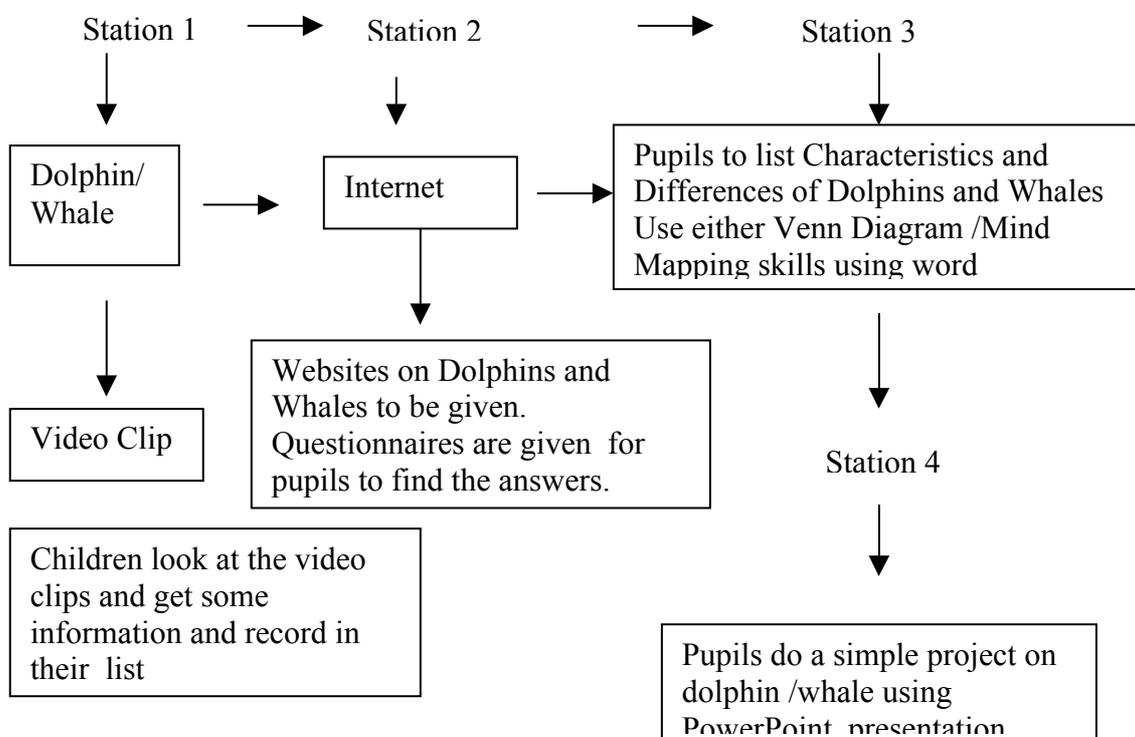
### The KWL Method.

- K- What I Know.
- W- What I like to know.
- L- What I have learnt.

An example of how this method can be incorporated in a Tamil lesson involving the use of Internet is as follows: -

### **Station Based Learning**

Topic on Dolphins and Whales



Each station - 15 minutes

The Station based learning has a lot of activities for pupils. Pupils are assigned to do go each stations and do their work. Pupils do their work in groups. This Station based learning can be done in Computer Lab or even in Classroom with 4 Computers. Pupils are independent doing their work. Thinking Skills are also initiated. Pupils' IT skills are also showcased.

Mind Mapping is a breakthrough accelerated learning technique which was invented by Tony Buzan. Mind Mapping is a very powerful tool for brainstorming, creative thinking, problem solving, organizing of ideas and note taking. Mind Mapping is a way of making notes using colours and patterns, key words and images so that the information is rendered holistically.

When creating Mind Maps, imagination and creativity are used to synthesize logically all the relevant key information in an organized way. Mind Mapping taps your whole brain, releases your brain potential and improves your memory with less work. Mind mapping strategy can also be integrated with web learning.

How exactly does Mind Mapping help?

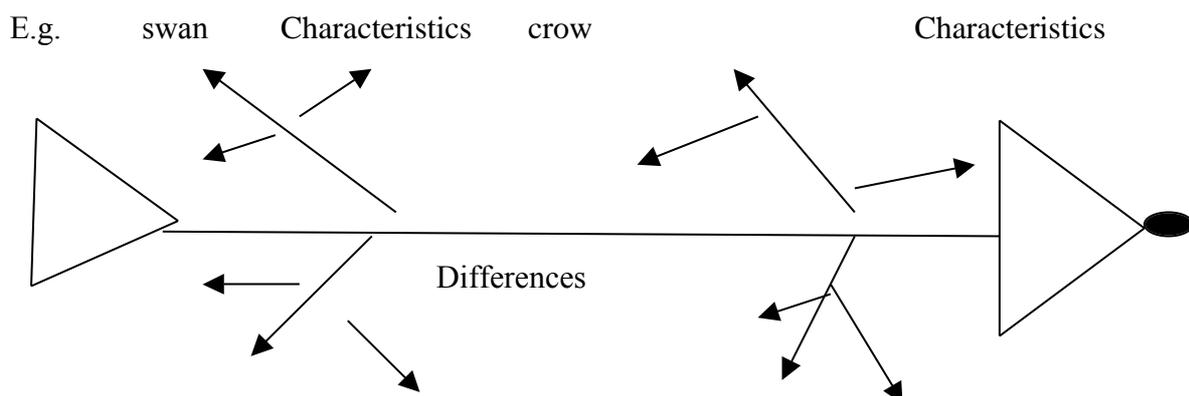
- It shows links between related points.
- It "juices" heavy study material.
- It makes learning fun.
- It facilitates the development of super memory.
- It ensures deep understanding & releases creativity.

(Reference : I am Gifted So are You! by Adam Khoo / [www.peterussell.com/MindMaps](http://www.peterussell.com/MindMaps))

Comprehension : Birds

Sourcing for information from websites. Listing the Characteristics in a fish bone diagram. Differences of the birds characterise can be written in the diagram below.

Characteristics of the birds can be listed

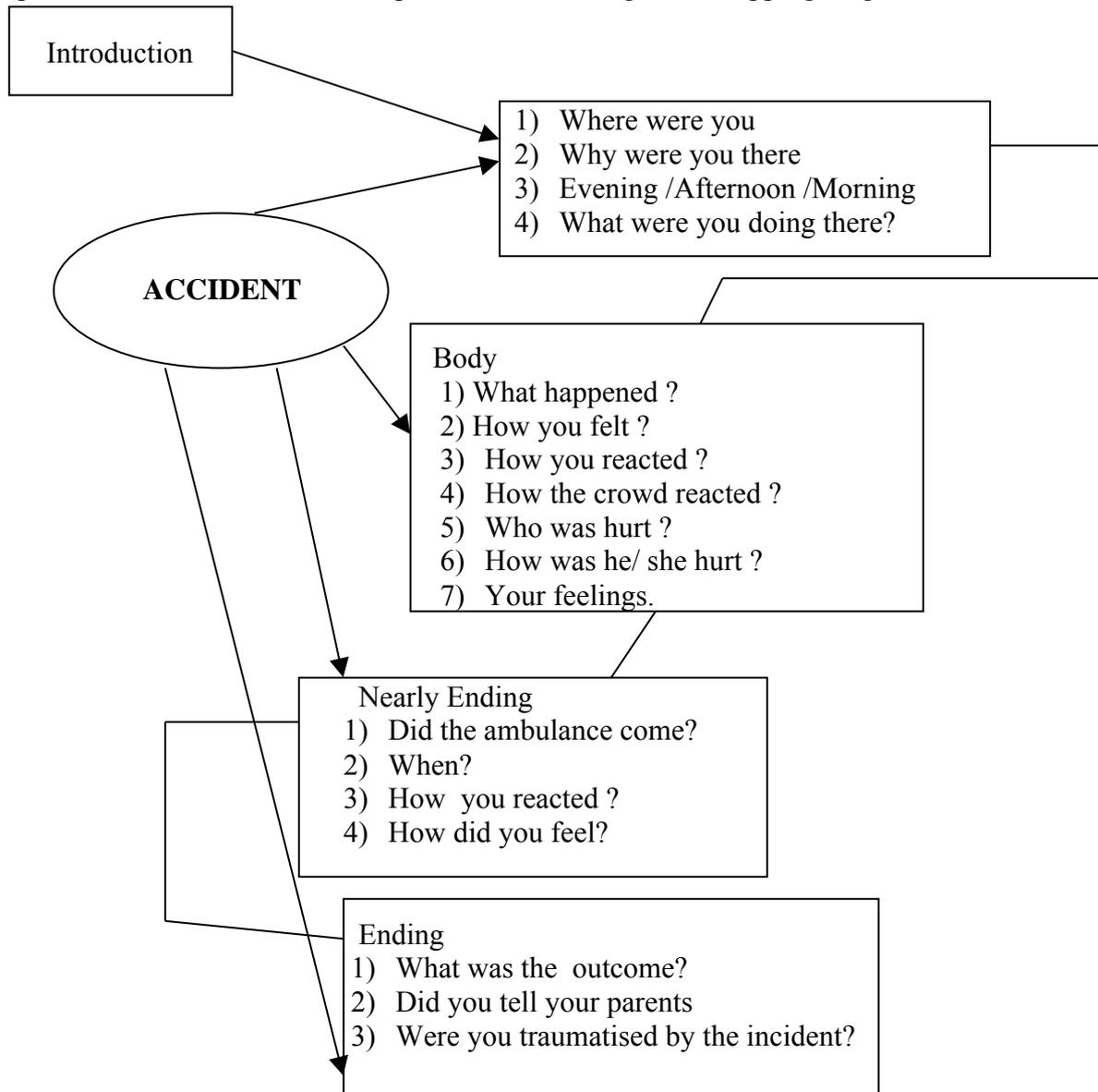


The group then distinguish these facts. The pupils then can discuss based on the fish bone diagram. Questions are then easily answered. Inferential questions are easily answered from the group discussions. Even a topic like this passage a factual one can be done in an interesting manner.

MIND-MAPPING in Composition Writing. This method allows pupils to broaden their perspectives as they branch out their ideas under certain topics and categories. The practice of mind mapping also helps pupils to plan their essays effectively.

As pupils from Primary two are trained to write composition the teacher has to give a strong foundation in their writing skills. Mind Mapping is perfect tool for expressing of ideas.

PowerPoint slide with a picture of an accident will be shown and a discussion will follow. Pupils will brainstorm and come up with the following mind mapping diagram.



Mind mapping can be done in a simple manner for lower primary pupils. Pictures with the key words given pupils can do the mind mapping diagram as mentioned above. Primary 1 & 2 pupils can do pictorial format first as introduction to explain their story. This will boost their thinking skills and be able to come out with creative and expressive stories.

## BUBBLE QUOTES

Pupils are to use this Bubbles quotes for composition writing for all levels. A passage was extracted from <http://www.singtisc.org/edu/pr/index.htm> from primary two topic- seaside written by pupils. The teacher used that passage and did a power point presentation using bubble quote strategy. The first picture had a family picture. A bubble quote was drawn and pupils in groups were brainstorm and discuss the places the family can visit. The second picture will give them a clue of where is the destination the family have decided. In every slide there will be a picture, a bubble quote with a question. As pupils see the picture it gives them some ideas for discussion and they will be able to list the words. E.g. the picture of the seaside was shown and a question was also stated. What can you see in the seaside? The pupils listed things like coconut trees, seashells, sandcastle, beach, pupils playing, crabs and etc. From this activity pupils learnt new words. Using bubble quotes strategy pupils can infuse their thinking skills to write a creative and expressive story. This can be done for other topics such for comprehension exercises.

CLIP ART PICTURES. Here pupils work in groups. Teacher to identify some pictures from the net. Members in the groups brainstorm and come up with a storyline for the pictures. Members to present the story to the class. This method also stimulates creative thought in the pupils.

### **Cooperative Learning Strategy used in Classroom**

Upper Primary (title about Kings as Warriors)

The teacher used the <http://www.singtisc.org/edu/pr/index.htm> to source information on kings. The was a topic on King (Pari King) . Teacher extracted the source of information and use CL strategies. The teacher grouped pupils. Each pupil was asked to list at least one king's name. When the group has decided the king name for their group, they were asked to discuss why they chose the name among the partners. (Think Pair Share). Then they share with the group and later share with the class. Every group will have a chance to say their point of view.

The passage about King (Pari King) were given to the groups. Pupils were asked to read the passage. The teacher then used Numbered Heads together. Students were numbered off. Teacher asks a key question. (Numbered Heads together )- the pupils discussed. Teacher called any number from the group explanation. This activity is interesting because the pupil will not know who is a being called and as a result everyone has to concentrate and discuss in order to answer the question. Each group had a variety of answers with good explanation. The Conclusion –The teacher made the lesson very interesting by using the Candyfloss strategy. The pupils in the group were asked to list the things - The good qualities of a king. The pupils listed many good The person with the most listed ones will then asked to say all the values and the others will then write it down if it is not in the list. The other will also given the chance to say what is not common. At the end of the lesson each group came up with the long list of moral values of a good king. Ideas were stretched and thinking skills were instilled and there was an increase in the vocabulary. Pupils also learnt moral values from this activity.

The aspects shared by the Singapore Tamil Classroom Challenge has now set free teachers who were previously encased in a traditional teacher centered mode. It has also sought to dispel fears of involving computers in classroom teaching. It has enamored those who are computer literate. It has seduced those who wanted to try but were hesitant to indulge. Teachers can try the strategies and methods shared as they are realistic, challenging and can motivate quiet, uncooperative and off task pupils found in almost every classroom. There is also plenty of scope for teachers to maximize the factors involved in each of these strategies to the fullest extent.

Finally we seek to seek to congratulate and commend all those who have been using or have used these strategies to achieve success in the classes. They are also co-authors of this paper.

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