Infusing Media-Literacy to Help Learners Construct and Make Sense of their Learning

Sivagouri Kaliamoorthy
Beacon Primary School, Singapore
sivagouri_kaliamoorthy@moe.edu.sg

Abstract: Our pupils live in a technology and media-driven environment. They are also surrounded by wealth of information. Constructive learning takes place when they are able to connect, construct and relate this information to the situated context. In preparing our learners for the 21st Century, it is essential for our pupils to be able to gather information, analyse them, and relate it to the situated context. Hence, there is a need to move beyond a focus on basic competency in the core subjects to promoting understanding of content at much higher levels by weaving media literacy into curriculum and providing a meaningful experience in language literacy. Infocomm technologies could act as a powerful tool for pupils to get connected. By leveraging on technology, pupils take an active role in searching for relevant information via the Internet to substantiate their understanding of the information presented in the newspaper articles. This process helped pupils to be independent learners situated within an authentic context. By tapping on technologies and infusing media literacy into the curriculum, pupils use their four basic language skills effectively and started to take ownership of their learning.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Media Literacy

1.   Introduction & Purpose

Pupils are surrounded by wealth of knowledge. Today, at the click of a button pupils can view the events happening around them in just seconds. Information is transported within seconds and it is important that our pupils are equipped with the skill to search for the information, be critical in selecting information and make sense of the information presented.

In this information age, education is mandated to respond to demands in two directions: on the one hand, it has to transmit an increasing amount of constantly evolving knowledge and know-how adapted to a knowledge-driven civilization; on the other hand, it has to enable learners not to be overwhelmed by the flows of information, while keeping personal and social development as its end in view. Therefore 'education must ... simultaneously provide maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and the compass that will enable people to find their way in it' (Delors *et al.*, p85). This translates in a shift in focus on the amount of content to be taught in schools. It calls for greater emphasis in equipping our pupils with skills to search for the relevant information independently supporting the nation-wide 'Teach Less Learn More'[1] initiative.

The nature of learning by our young digital natives has also transformed. The nature of and type of skills has also changed. They are surrounded by information. World Wide Web can be

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[1] 'Teach Less; Learn More' (TLLM) is a call for schools and teachers to focus more on the active learning of students and the construction of their own knowledge.

assessed at a click of the button. In their world, knowledge can be shared and co-constructed. Thus, there is an urgent need to equip them with skills and lenses to handle this influx of information.

Understanding the needs of the young learners, information communication technology is integrated in their learning processes. Information communication technological tools are applied as constructive tools. "Constructive tools are general-purpose tools that can be used for manipulating information, constructing one's own knowledge or visualizing one's understanding" (Lim & Tay, 2003). Jonassen and Carr (2000) purport a constructivist approach, "ICT as mind tools for the construction evaluating, analysing, connecting, elaborating, synthesizing, imagining, designing, problem-solving, and decision-making." The term "constructive" stems from the fact that these tools enable students to produce a certain tangible product for a given instructional purpose.

This paper takes a reflective, narrative approach in documenting my attempt to integrate media literacy into my daily lessons.

2. My Reflections

As a daily assembly program, the school Principal shares important news that appears in the newspaper. As an extension to the daily assembly program during the Mother Tongue Language lessons, pupils are also engaged in classroom discussion. During these discussions, pupils were observed to be very engaged and used the language appropriately. Pupils showed great interest in the issues and expressed that they would like to find out more regarding the news read to them during the morning assembly.

In the school, all Tamil pupils work in a one-to-one computing learning environment. Pupils were introduced to search engines and were guided in searching for the relevant information. Pupils were taught cyberwellness and precautionary measures were taken when pupils browse the given website.

Age would not be a barrier in understanding world issues if it is tailored to meet the needs of the young learners. What really matters is whether pupils are equipped with skill to understand the implication and impact of the issue discussed.

As a start pupils start to discuss issues closer to their homes. For instance, there was an article of fighting amongst teenagers. Teacher selected this article to discuss but realised that the need to set the context before broaching and discussing the issue. During civics and moral education, a big book entitled "who can watch the television?" was introduced. The story elates about how two siblings will fight over to watch a program in television and neither would give in to the other. The mother would come and off the television set. The teacher then posed questions as to what are the consequences of these actions. The pupils then worked in their respective groups and presented moral reasoning for the action. They were able to relate chain actions that would take place if the siblings were to continue with their behaviour. Following this lesson, pupils were introduced to the article. There was an intense discussion amongst pupils and what were the implications to the society and country. Pupils related the probable consequences.

After the introduction of the Australian bush fire. Tamil pupils expressed that they wished to know more about this problem. Pupils used the Internet search engines to look up for latest

update on the Australian bush fire. In the hope of searching, pupils watched the bush fire live at BBC news website. They then took upon themselves to update one another on the latest on this bush fire. Pupils expressed civic mindedness and sympathy for those who have been affected. They discussed and evaluated the situation and thought about the things that the victims might have lost and the possible implication on their lives. It was heart warming to note pupils expressed concern and empathy for those affected.

In conjunction with Total Defence day pupils had to go online and search for relevant information. The search helped them to investigate the rational for celebrating Total Defence Day and the five different defences in Singapore. It is important in ensuring the safety and security of our country and its people. This was discussed and created an awareness and understanding of issues that surrounded them. They used presentation tool to express their findings.

In the later part of the year, there was a topic on advertisement. Pupils gathered different types of advertisements and analysed the information presented in the advertisement. They discussed and brought out the underlying catch in the advertisements. They did a search online to find out the market price of those goods advertised and critically evaluated the advertisement. They reasoned whether they it was cost-effective to purchase those advertised. They presented their views to the class. Pupils used presentation tool to do up the advertisements. The computer was used as a constructive tool to construct their advertisements. They presented their advertisements and the peers evaluated and analysed the information.

All Tamil pupils were also introduced to Malay martial arts,[2] Silat. By enabling the pupils to synthesise their ideas for the creation of multimedia productions using tools such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Photostory 3 they were able to hone their information and media literacy skills. Microsoft PowerPoint was used to scaffold pupils' learning of oral skills through well placed images and sound clips. In the process of many lessons, pupils actively formulated and shared their understanding of the required curricular objectives. Tamil language pupils were actively engaged in storyboarding and scripting. This year the Primary 2 pupils have extended their exposure to interview skills when they scripted questions, video-graphed interviews and subsequently edited them via Windows Moviemaker. Technology was leveraged when pupils used the search engine to gain in-depth understanding of the culture after the lesson on martial arts. Pupils worked together in groups of four and brainstormed possible interview questions to ask the instructor to address/supplement the gaps in their search. The pupil editor collated the responses from the team members and used Microsoft Word to type the questions and prepare the template for the reporter. The templates were then emailed to the other team members for feedback. The editor then incorporates the changes and finalises the interview questions. During the hands-on sessions, pupil cameramen took mug shots (photo coverage) and passed it to the pupil producer. After the hands-on session, the reporter interviewed the Silat instructor in Tamil language and the entire process was video taped. The producer cum newscaster with the help of the other team members used Microsoft Windows Movie Maker and edited the interview segments, selected and inserted the pictures and the edited movie clip on to a PowerPoint slide presented it as a and presented the news. Pupils were given a flow chart of organisers as guide to them in the editing process.

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[2] Silat is a Malay Martial Arts and is originated from the Malay Archipelago thousands of years ago. It is an art of fighting and defense of the Malays.

The selection of technology was used as a constructive tool to bring out the learning and appreciating the Malay culture. Pupils used their experience in the situated context infusing the cultural transmission through internalizing the desirable values of respect of another culture by understanding the significance of the Malay cultural heritage. These values permeate the environment as they learn and appreciate the rich Malay cultural martial arts, Silat.

3.   Discussion & Conclusion

Technology is used as a constructive tool to facilitate pupils learning and making sense of their learning. Pupils' engagement was evident throughout the project. They were critical about their work and had done numerous editing before submitting the project. Pupils were actively using the net to search for information to enhance their learning.

The project had benefited even the weaker pupils, who was observed to be actively contributing ideas and was working towards completing their group project. There was such joy when the pupils presented their project. As the project helped to bring out the best in each pupil, pupils gave positive feedback that they would like to do more of such projects. Every team member had contributed and has equal share in the project, thus the ownership was very strong amongst them. Pupils were seen interacting, playing with the Malay pupils even after the project.

In terms of skills, all pupils had learned basic photo-taking skills and are able to use the questioning techniques to generate interview questions. Through this project it was observed that pupils had tapped on prior knowledge and experience in developing the interview questions more confidently. (e.g., interview with a journalist from the Singapore one-off Tamil Channel News Segment held in Term 1, 2009). Pupils learned to use the information and ideas presented in a graphical organiser format to organise ideas and create the end product. Pupils learned about the different job scopes/roles (e.g., producer, director, editor and reporter in a press crew and was able to practice the skills. Pupils initiated role-play not only polished the respective skills it also brought the independence in them. Pupils exhibited strong bonding and collaboration during the various collaborated sessions. The usage of technology was pervasive and pupils creating media worthy products were a big step. As Burn.,A. (2009), had pointed out "the new ability to digitally undo and reconstruct still and moving image (and audio) enables the students to become writers as well readers of the visual … the literacies of the visual semiotic they have required become extended in the digital manipulation of image, and in the trans-coding of image to word and back again, in group discussion and written commentary"

This paper is my attempt to share possible strategies in integrating digital media into our daily lessons. It is through such sharing and exchanges where ideas could build upon ideas to further push the boundaries of our pursuit for pedagogical break throughs in this fast changing world.

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