Employing collaborative reflective practice to explore the teaching of reading:
A case study from Timor-Leste

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The team

- Collaboration between UNTL English department staff and co-researchers based at the University of Waikato, Aotearoa (New Zealand),

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- José Luis da Silva

Amaral, Barnard, Field and McLellan (2009) and Barnard, Field & McLellan, (2011)

The research problem

- identified by Timorese team members

- little sense of progression in reading as students moved through the curriculum

- examine current practice, and in particular the way in which new vocabulary is introduced

Associated literature

….."the use of reflective practice in teacher professional

development is based on the belief that teachers can

improve their own teaching by consciously and

systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences."

(Farrell 2007)

Self-inquiry and critical thinking

"…can help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (p. 5).

Richards (1990)

Critical reflection

….. "can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching" and "teachers who are better informed as to the nature of their teaching are able to reflect on what aspects of their teaching they need to change p. 4".

Richards and Lockhart (1994)

Collaborative reflective practice

… ' when teachers come together on their own initiative in order to reflect on their work, they can complement individual members' strengths, and compensate for each member's limitations, all for the common good of the group and the institutions in which they work p.120."

Farrell (2007)

Ecology of the setting

Team awareness that:

- the pedagogy relating to teaching reading and approach to reflective practice should be considered in the light of contextual affordances and constraints

- Collaborative approach ensured that ownership of potential changes would remain with the team and perhaps avoid 'tissue rejection'.   (Holliday 1992)

Vocabulary

Three areas to know a word

- knowledge of form
- knowledge of meaning
- knowledge of use

- Receptive and productive skills
- Passive and active vocabulary

Nation, ISP (2001) p.27.

- However languages are not exact parallels of each other
  so concepts, referents and associations need to be addressed
  Harmer, J. (2012)

Introducing new vocabulary

▸ situations about a subject's life

▸ dialogues or texts about students' lives

▸ pictures or photos or gestures can be used

▸ students can be asked to follow instructions

▸ a task based approach

▸ students can research the new language themselves become language 'miners' or ethnographers

Harmer (2012) p.106

Reading

▸ **helps language acquisition**

"reading at the appropriate level is one of the best ways for students to get comprehensible input, that is language they can understand" Harmer (2012) p.122

▸ **Krashen's study**

Sustained Silent Reading programme had positive results (Krashen (1993) p. 32 – 35

Reading aloud

▸ "is often not very useful since it does not help them to understand a text and many do it very badly"

Harmer (2012) p.69

▸ "giving students opportunity to preview the material first and asking them to think about how to read the text, and perhaps 'mumbling' the words to themselves before reading aloud"

Harmer (2012) pp. 216-217

Translation

- these methods utilise the target language only

- 'many older students value translation as a tool '   Harmer (2012)

- 'quick, simple and easily understood'   Nation (2001) p. 86

- recent action research conducted by Barnard, Robinson, da Costa, and da Silva Sarmento found that Tetum and Portuguese, Bahasa Indonesia were used during class time as well as English.

Setting and methods

- Observation of four one-hour reading lessons with students from Years I – IV

- range of activities and roles of both students and teachers recorded

- time frames of lesson stages recorded

- class sizes range from between 20 to 45 students

- reading texts of between 100 and 200 words selected

Findings

▶ **Familiarisation with text**

multiple opportunities for students to read and listen to the text

– read aloud

–read silently

–read in groups aloud

–teacher read a line followed by students

– individual students asked to read aloud
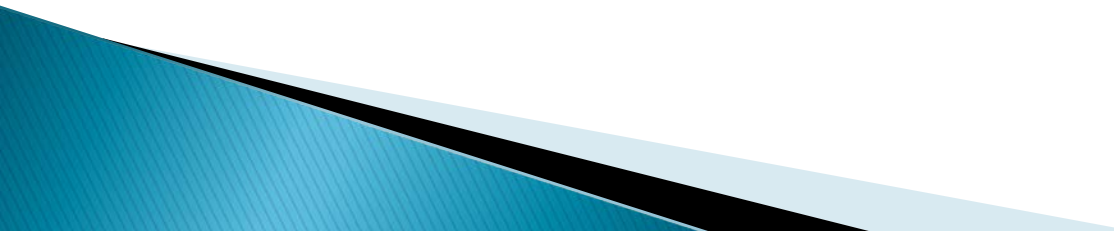
▶ **(31.25% of total lesson time)**

Gaining meaning from text

- verbal means
- questioning
- concept checking
- explanation (in English or in another language if needed)

(Also took 31.25% of total lesson time)

Pronunciation

▸ teacher pronounced the word or phrase, then choral repetition by class

▸ repetition used, and native speakers of English were held up as the model

▸ reading aloud provided the teacher with knowledge of their students' competence with pronunciation

▸ (4.1 % of total class time)

Practice tasks

Sentence completion

Comprehension tasks

Grammar tasks

Dictionary work

▸ **33.5% of total lesson time**

▸ However little evidence of reviewing of new vocabulary

Reflections and implications

Recommendation 1:   Reading aloud

‣ Increase time of silent reading (with reading aloud or 'mumbling' encouraged if needed) Harmer (2012), p. 216 – 217

‣ Investigation into the impact of extensive reading and sustained silent reading in further action research

More focused and meaningful activities

▶ **Recommendation 2**:

▶ research recycling and revisiting new vocabulary

▶ further exploitation of text

▶ review new vocabulary – end of lesson and start of following lesson

▶ more activities; paper based, oral and verbal,

▶ Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Departmental protocol for use of languages other than English

(a)   pronounce the word in English

(b)   offer a synonym or phrase of a similar meaning

(c)   use a dictionary

(d)   translate from Tetum, Bahasa Indonesia or Portuguese whichever is appropriate

Action research suggestion

Further action research which investigates teacher's and students' perceptions about the use of languages other than English to support language learning

Build on present practice

- **Recommendation 3:**

- to consider building on current practices of oral interaction by inquiring into dialogic teaching approaches
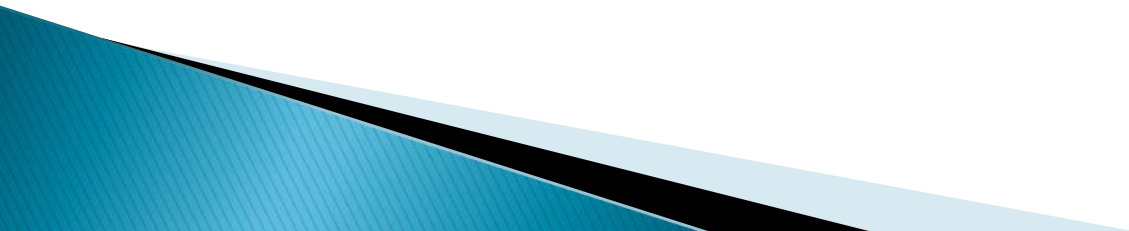
Alexander (2008)

Potential action research

- 1. Increase silent reading time in class

- 2. Extensive reading project linking classroom and English Language Centre

- 3. Introduce new tasks to consolidate vocabulary

- 4. Students' and teachers' perceptions about use of languages other than English when learning English

- 5. Begin to investigate dialogic teaching approach to build on oral tradition and current practice

Thank you very much.

Do you have any questions?

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