

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this concluding chapter I shall discuss the findings and some of the insights gained from the study. I shall also discuss some of the pedagogical implications of the use of semantic mapping as a teaching strategy and action research as a technique for the ongoing professional development of teachers.

#### **5.1 Main Concerns of the Study**

The study was an exploration into a particular strategy to overcome the problems that the students faced in reading comprehension. The findings indicated that students faced two main problems. These were problems with vocabulary and inadequate background knowledge about the content in the text.

##### **5.1.1 Key Informants and Reading Comprehension Text**

The four key informants in this study came from different backgrounds. Their backgrounds determined their proficiency levels. They were mature students who were highly motivated and the English Language 914 paper was an elective for all of them. As English was their second language many of the students found reading comprehension daunting. This was due to the fact that at an advanced level the texts chosen were mostly expository. These expository texts were more complex with ideas that were more sophisticated. This required students to be evaluative and analytical. The findings have indicated that firstly, students who were more exposed to the English language were more proficient in it. Secondly, the findings showed that students who had more experiences with the language used their prior knowledge from these experiences to make meaning from reading texts they encountered.

**5.1.2     Insights from the Intervention**

The study investigated the problems students had with reading comprehension that stemmed from two key areas, vocabulary and content familiarity. It was found that students were more concerned about the meanings of individual words rather than the whole text. They also had a problem with content that was unfamiliar because of inadequate prior knowledge. To address these two concerns in reading comprehension the teacher intervened and taught them how to map out the ideas in the text using the semantic mapping strategy.

In the action research process the first step was to identify the problem that the students had. This was followed by the planning and intervention stage and semantic mapping was used. The findings indicated that with semantic mapping students could:

- i.         identify the main ideas in the text,
- ii.        locate supporting details and make connections to show how they were logically related thus, ‘shaping’ the content structure of the reading text
- iii.       visualize the ideas through diagrammatic and pictorial representations of the content. This enabled ESL students to visualize aspects of meaning.

Through its highlighting of key elements of the text and their linkages as well as its use of visual representations, semantic mapping proved to be an important teaching-learning strategy which helped ESL students build bridges between the reading text and the meaning they embodied. Semantic mapping provides an alternative form to represent the text, which is more accessible to ESL learners. With the pictorial representation students are able to visualize the key aspects of meaning of the text.

### 5.1.3 Insights from Action Research

Action research allows teachers to unearth the hidden life of a classroom. From the participant observation in the classroom I realized many new things which I had not noticed before. For example, the seating arrangements where the boys sat on one side and the girls sat on one side raised the concern of gender biases during discussions. I had decided to use a text on the position of women in the past and I wanted them to form a more balanced view. As I had written in my journal entry, “ I was surprised I never really noticed all this although it was a small class”. With participant observation and the questionnaire I seemed to have a clearer view of at least the attributes of the students and the classroom setting.

From the interview with the informants I had a better perception about their learning strategies. I was surprised to know that S3 was from a Chinese primary school. He was not very proficient in the subject because he had very limited exposure to English Language but he was very determined to do well despite all odds. He told me he spent a lot of time reading. “I usually read the main news and I discuss with my brothers and sister. We buy the *Star* paper everyday and although my parents do not read and write English they encourage us to improve in the language”. I felt his sincere desire to do well in the language. He also said he wished he had been as keen as this earlier he would have been good in this language. I also realized that every student is a different individual with different needs. Teachers should spend more time understanding them.

My intervention strategies resulted in improved practice. I noticed that groupwork produced livelier and more animated discussions. There was more activation of prior knowledge as ideas were linked to what students had read, heard or learnt earlier. I felt there was some positive change in the way they conducted discussions. There was also more focus

as they discussed with the leading questions I had given them. My four informants seemed to progress as they gained confidence through support from their peers.

From my observations I found myself getting deeply involved in wanting to improve my teaching and helping my students excel and also enjoy learning. I was reflecting on my teaching especially by writing the journal. I was critical about my teaching, discussing my lessons with colleagues and I even invited one of my colleagues to observe my teaching. I continually interrogated my practice asking questions such as ‘what?’ and ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ about events that took place as I taught reading comprehension. These questions guided my teacher reflections.

Altan (1997) defines reflection as a way of thinking about educational matters that entails the ability to make rational choice and also to assume full responsibility for those choices. Action research is desirable because the need and desire for improvement and change for the better comes from within us. As Altan says, “when change is imposed from outside, it is bitterly resented.” (1997 p. 12). My commitment to the use of a new strategy was a result of the fact that it was I who decided on this change.

## **5.2 Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study may be used to provide insights with implications for practice. Firstly, suggests the use of semantic mapping as a strategy for teaching reading comprehension by practising teachers. Then, there are the implications for curriculum developers and material producers. Finally the implications concern teacher education and development.

### **5.2.1 Implications for Classroom Teachers**

If we want to aim at quality techniques and keep abreast with current trends and learning approaches in the teaching of reading comprehension, semantic mapping is a technique that can fulfil this goal. It equips students with metacognitive skills so that they can become more analytical and able to make connections among concepts and ideas present in text.. By infusing creative and critical thinking using semantic mapping we can motivate them to enhance their competence in reading comprehension. Teachers can encourage students to use their own experience and knowledge to predict and make inferences. Semantic mapping allows students to think and decide independently what they achieve from reading.

Reading comprehension is complex process where students, especially advanced-level ESL students are faced with the daunting task of comprehending very sophisticated ideas. With semantic mapping students are able to use diagrams to help them figure out the main and the supporting details. Semantic mapping provides words with context where individual words can be seen in relation with larger ideas. Mapping provides the environment in which words are viewed as part of a larger whole. The findings in this study have shown that students have lesser problems with words in context.

Semantic webbing should be used in the classroom to teach reading comprehension for expository and narrative texts. As students create their own webs and improve them after discussion they are using their metacognitive skills. This enhances comprehension helping them deal with literal and inferential questions. Teachers could attempt to use this technique as it could help students to become more creative and more competent in answering high-order comprehension questions.

### **5.2.2 Implications for Curriculum Developers and Textbook Writers**

Curriculum developers and textbook writers and material producers can incorporate the use of semantic mapping in the activities that they devise for students. They can devise activities that involve the active use of semantic mapping for teaching and learning. Worksheets and tasks that utilize semantic mapping can facilitate learning through the activation of prior knowledge and by providing context to exercises on vocabulary. Semantic mapping has been used by many classroom teachers to enhance learning such as illustrated in the example by Naughton (1994) in Chapter 2 on 'The Titanic Sinks' (see p. 26) or the text in this study entitled 'The Chinese Girl in Singapore, 1913'(see p. 93). Semantic mapping facilitates comprehension because it stimulates the right brain to process through diagrams and drawings. It also makes students become more creative.

### **5.2.3 Implications for Teacher Educators**

We are today confronted with an array of teaching methods, new and innovative strategies as well as technologically advanced teaching aids. Therefore, we must equip ourselves with the desire to want to change with the times, change for the better. Teaching is not an easy job but we can make it less daunting and more fruitful if we are willing to improve ourselves as reflective teachers. Stenhouse's central message for teachers was "that they should regard themselves as researchers, as the best judges of their practice" (cited in McNiff, 1988, p.25). John Field (1998) sums up our responsibility as teachers with, "it is our professional responsibility to monitor the effect our teaching is having upon learners, and to modify our behaviour in accordance with what we discover." (1998, p.49). This aptly sums up what teachers can and should do to enhance both teaching and learning. Action research brings enormous benefits to all those involved in it. As Altan's (1997) perception of action

research, reveals, “there is no single strategy that can contribute more to improvement than ongoing professional development”(p. 7). Action research helps teachers to unearth the hidden life of the classroom and this is important for true teaching-learning and professional development.

In conclusion, semantic mapping is a good strategy for the activation of students' prior knowledge as they elicit what they know about the topic or idea. This is important because knowledge is anchored to previous knowledge and gives students a sense that they already know certain things. This self-knowledge is a strength that motivates them to learn more. A completed semantic map also gives students a sense of accomplishment and gives them self-confidence. With semantic mapping they are also able to connect ideas in a more organized and coherent way. Completed maps serve as a guide in information selection and as a springboard for new ideas. Semantic mapping allows students to visualize graphically the concepts through discussion. The graphic structure of the semantic maps can help students organize the information gained through reading. This also helps develop students' organizational skill.

Teachers can use semantic mapping at different stages of reading for example as a pre-reading, while reading and as a post reading strategy. Semantic mapping allows teachers to assess students' knowledge on the topic as they map out their responses while activating prior knowledge. Semantic mapping helps teachers to teach students how to organize and hierarchically structure the information in a text. Semantic mapping can therefore, build bridges in the process of meaning-making.