

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the study which seeks to investigate how genres are learned and how genres facilitate learning. This case-study explores genre in its three interrelated purposes: *learning the fable genre*, *learning about the fable genre* - fostering an awareness of fables to facilitate the writing of fables and *learning through the fable genre* - using fables as tools for critical thinking and learning in particular situations as adapted from Chapman, 1999.

This study, on the reading and writing of fables was driven by two main questions:

- i. How did learning about the fable genre help the learners in writing their own fables?
- ii. How did learning through the fable genre help support and extend learners' critical thinking?

Both these questions sought to explore the success or lack of success of a genre based pedagogy.

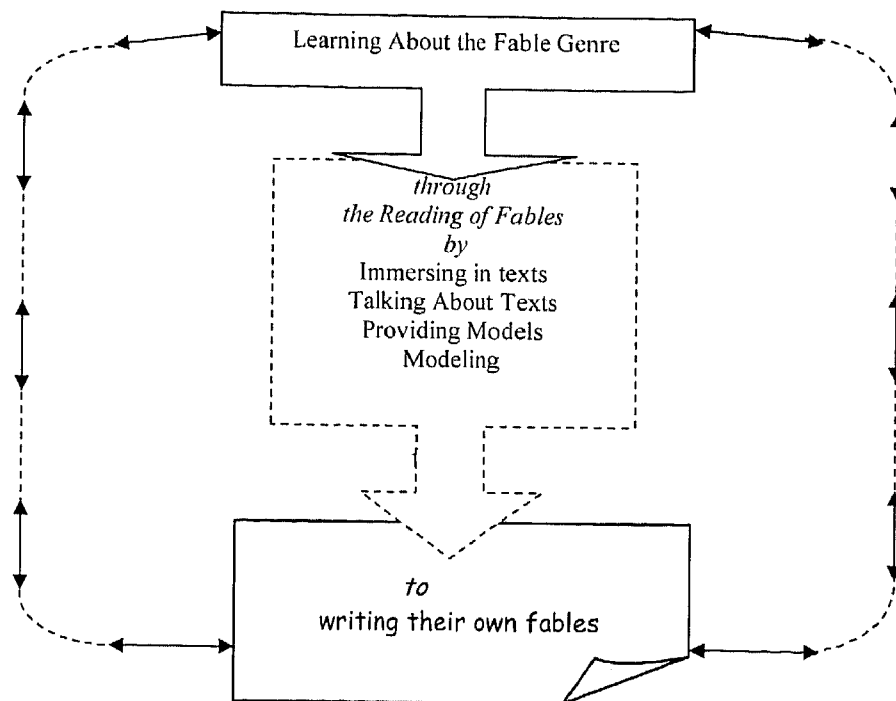
#### 4.2 Learning About the Fable Genre

One of the research questions posed in this study was whether learning about the fable genre helped the learners in writing their own fables. I found that:

- i. mere immersion in fables was insufficient in helping the learners *to* write their own fables.
- ii. 'talk about text' during the immersion period helped learners *to* discover the generic features of fables.
- iii. learners became more conscious about the different fables they read and drew from them ideas which helped them compose their own fable.
- iv. providing models and modeling in addition to immersion helped learners write better fables.
- v. knowledge about the genre helped to empower learners.

To illustrate my findings, I will first give an account of what the learners learnt about the fable genre. I will present this in a detailed account of their 'becoming aware of' or 'becoming conscious' of the generic features of fables through the reading of fables. I will also present how this reading of fables helped my learners in writing their own fables. The fables that my learners heard, read on their own, reviewed and revised will form the framework within which I discuss my findings. Writing is a recursive process, not a linear one. Hence, my learners constantly moved back and forth, from learning about the fable genre to writing their own 'emergent' fable. Thus, I discuss the findings as they emerge in three sections; Beginnings, Reading Fables and Writing Fables. Figure 4 represents my framework.

Figure 4: Reading of Fables Scaffolding the Writing of Fables



#### 4.2.1 Beginnings

I noticed that all four of my learners wrote a '*readymade fable*' (Erik), meaning a fable they have read or heard before. Erik wrote *The Tortoise and the Rabbit* (see Appendix C1), Elena wrote *The Rabbit and the Tortoise* (see Appendix C4), Katrena wrote *The Ant and Bird* (see Appendix C3), while Jenitaa wrote *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse* (see Appendix C2). Their '*readymade*' fables had the elements of a story; characters, setting, plot. Jenitaa and Katrena (see Appendix C2 & C3) did not state the

moral value explicitly although Jenitaa herself mentioned that '*it's got morality*'. But Erik and Elena did.

Elena ends with: *The moral of the story is Do not be to proud of yourself.*

Erik's ending: *So this is a lesson for the rabbit don't be proud of your self.*

In their first drafts, Elena and Erik as well as Jenitaa (verbally) showed an awareness of the convention of fable, that is, it ends with a moral value.

As I studied the texts produced by my four learners, I also saw another element of the structure and cohesive feature of narratives. They seem to be aware that fables perform the goal of entertaining. Their distinctive opening structure reveals this awareness as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Opening Structure of Fables Inherent in Learners Written Fables

Participants	Opening Structure	Evidence	Appendix
Erik, 11	<i>Once upon a time</i> , there lives a rabbit and . .	Sentence 1, draft 1	C1
Jenitaa, 11	<i>One day</i> , there was a city mouse . . .	Sentence 1, draft 1	C2
Katrena,9	<i>Ounce</i> , there was a ant who wanted to drink	Sentence 1, draft 1	C3
Elena,10	<i>Once</i> , there was a rabbit who . . .	Sentence 1, draft 1	C4

This structure can be identified most clearly with fairy stories and fables. This shows that my learners were already drawing upon their cultural resources in their process of writing. When I asked them why they had such an opening, they told me that

stories are usually started like that. They seem to be aware of the function of fable, that is, fables serve the purpose of entertaining. Bakhtin (1979/1986) in Chapman (1999) states that 'even when we write to and for ourselves we use words in ways that we have learned from our communities and cultures'. Fairytales, fables and folklore are part of the storytelling tradition that surrounds children. They have been fed with stories with such a structure and have themselves read stories that uses such a structure, that they '*automatically started it*' (Jenitaa). They were not aware that they had used such a structure because it was '*the normal way of writing story*' (Erik). Katrena added, '*because whenever we tell story, we always say Once upon a time or One day*'.

Table 4.2: Prior Knowledge of the Features of Fables

Features of Fables	Data Sample
♦ Ends with a moral value	i. Verbally - Jenitaa ♦ <i>it's got morality</i>  ii. Written Product - Elena & Erik ♦ moral value explicitly written at the end of the essay
♦ Begins with 'Once upon a time' structure	All the 4 learners began their essay with ♦ <i>Once upon a time . . .</i> ♦ <i>One day . . .</i>

Table 4.2 indicates my learners' prior knowledge of fables. My learners came with the prior knowledge that fables are stories that end with a moral value and begins with '*Once upon a time . . .*'.

#### 4.2.2 Reading Fables

The pre-discussion data revealed that the participants came with the existing knowledge that fables are stories that begin with '*Once upon a time*' and end with a moral value. They could tell me nothing else. Then the learners were immersed in fables (see Appendices F and G) as advocated by Calkins (1994), Daane (1991) and Chapman (1999). Calkins (1994) advises that in most genre studies, begin by immersing learners in the genre. Daane (1991) also has a similar advice to give. She says, " . . . if we expect students to evolve as writers, we must be very sure they are immersed in print". Only through reading, she believes, will they acquire the schemes that will enable them to replicate the textures, rhythms, and logic of good writing in a variety of genres. Hence, I immersed them in fables. I read the fables aloud with expressions and gestures so that they might not only 'hear' the fable but get a feel of the fable. I asked no questions. Table 4.3 below summarises my learners 'becoming aware of' or 'becoming conscious' of the generic features of a fable after immersion and 'talk about text'.

Table 4.3: Features of Fables as Identified by Learners After Discussion

Generic Features of Fables	Data Sample
I. Fables are not real	<i>Fables are not real, not like the storybook I am reading</i> <i>Now</i> (Elena). Misteris Telaga Tua involves people But fables involves animals.
II. Fables are make-believe	<i>It's like cerita dongeng</i> (Elena).
III. Mostly animal	<i>More animals than human</i> (Elena), after we had listed down
IV. characters in fables	the fables we had read.

V.	Fables are short	<i>My Misteri Telaga Tua so long one. I cannot even finish one book. I read so long already</i> (Elena)
VI.	Fables get resolved Fast	<i>Very fast can know ending</i> (Elena) compared to the storybook she has been reading
VII.	Characters are one dimensional	<i>The lion in 'The Lion and the Mouse is so kind but the lion in 'The Sick Lion' is so cruel.</i> (Katrenea)

I will illustrate my learners' "becoming aware of" or "becoming conscious" of the generic features of a fable as indicated in Table 4.3 through the reading of fables. After we had read about 10 fables, Elena uttered, '*teacher, fables are not real! Not like the storybook I am reading now - Misteri Telaga Tua*'. She meant that, her *Misteri Telaga Tua* involves people while the fables we had been reading is like '*cerita dongeng*' [fables], many with animal characters. Erik immediately disagreed. He retorted, '*The Boy Who Cried Wolf can be real what!*' At this juncture, we listed down all the fables we had read and the characters in each of these stories. We made two columns: human and animals. '*More animals than humans, teacher*' Elena pointed out pleased with herself. From just knowing that fables are stories with '*morality*', my learners now realised that fables are make-believe and they have mostly animal characters.

We continued reading more fables. This time the children wanted to take turns reading. We read about 10 more fables. '*Wow, we have read over 20 fables*' I remarked. Jenitaa immediately exclaimed, '*they are short!*'. '*Ya-lah teacher*', joined Elena, '*my Misteri Telaga Tua so long, I cannot even finish one book. I read so long already.*' They have now developed an understanding that fables are short and that they get resolved almost immediately, '*very fast can know ending*' (Elena). The other two girls quickly

agreed but Erik said, '*Comic also can finish reading fast what!*' Katrena retorted, '*that one not many words, lots of pictures only*'. They now know that fables are short.

We still continued reading more fables. We noticed that some animal characters appeared in more than one fable. For example the tortoise in *The Hare and The Tortoise* as well as in *The Tortoise That Wanted To Fly*. The lion in *The Lion and The Mouse* as well as in *The Lion and the Mosquito* or even in *The Sick Lion*. The children began to notice that in each fable the animal portrayed different characteristics. Jenitaa commented, '*teacher, why the tortoise in 'The Hare and The Tortoise' is so clever, but in 'The Tortoise That Wanted To Fly', it act so silly?*' Katrena quickly joined in saying, '*the lion also same. The lion was so kind in 'The Lion and The Mouse' but in 'The Sick Lion', it's so cruel one!*' They began to see that the characters in fables are usually one dimensional. The characters in each fable remain the same. They only appear to differ in another fable, not in the same fable.

Comparison of table 4.2 and table 4.3 illustrate my learners' expansion of knowledge about the fable genre. From only knowing that fables are stories that begin with 'Once upon a time . . .' and end with a moral value, they discovered through the immersion and 'talk about text' that fables also possess another six generic features as shown in table 4.3. Having listed down the generic features of fables (see Appendix J), we created a fable template (see Appendix K) which we named elements of fables. This was in response to Jenitaa's question. She asked, "*Teacher, is the moral value the leg of the essay?*" [Leg of the essay means the conclusion for Jenitaa]. Jenitaa's essay template in her head is the one drilled into her by her Chinese Language teacher, that an essay



should have a *head, body, leg* structure. I could see that Jenitaa was trying to put the fable into a structure she was familiar with. Thus we sat down in a circle, with sample fables and tried to create a template (see Appendix K). We decided that the fable should contain characters, place (which I taught them is called setting), events and moral. Jenitaa insisted that the setting and characters should be the head of the fable while the events is the body and the moral is the leg of the essay. My other learners too agreed with this.

In an attempt to apply this knowledge of the fable genre, my learners then went to the storybook shelves at the back of the study room and picked up a book to review. They would have to identify whether the story is a fable or otherwise using the features of fables identified. They read through the book and discussed in class if that particular book could be considered a fable (see Appendix B). Table 4.4 summaries the book review task.

Table 4.4: A Fable or Not a Fable

Learners	Book Chosen	Review
Erik, 11	Who Is the Best Child?	<i>It is a fable because got moral value at the end.</i>
Jenitaa, 11	Boastful Old Bear	<i>Yes this book is a fable because it ends with a moral value. The author uses animals in the story and the story is short.</i>
Katrena, 9	The Magic Pot	<i>I think this is a fable,,er... I am not sure. There are people in this story and not animals. The writer didn't write the moral value so I make up my own one - Do not waste food!</i>

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Elena, 10	The Wicked Frog	<i>Yes it is a fable because got teaching at the end of the story, got animal characters.</i>
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Elena with *The Wicked Frog* feels that the story tells us *Don't be wicked to others*. Erik read *Who Is The Best Child*, and said that it teaches *Don't be Proud of Your Self*. Jenitaa took *Boastful Old Bear* and wrote that '*a boastful **person** will try very hard to cover up **his** mistakes with excuses.*' Katrena chose *The Magic Pot*. There was no moral value stated explicitly at the end, but she made up one of her own, *Do not waste food*.

From Katrena, I saw that learning about genre can trigger imagination. Katrena chose a book which had no moral value stated explicitly at the end as other fables do. She realised that her book did not meet the criteria of a fable. Thus she used her knowledge about fables and created her own moral value to fit the story. Because she had learnt about the fable genre, she was able to use her knowledge critically and creatively found a moral value to suit the story.

This review session also revealed other connections my learners made in relation to fables. It is interesting to note that Jenitaa's story may be on the bear but Jenitaa's moral value is written for a human - she uses '**person**' and '**his**'. She also said something similar during the reading of fables session. As we were discussing the fables, Jenitaa pointed out that *fables and parables are the same. We learn something at the end*. When asked to explain, she went on to give the example of the Good Samaritan (see Appendix I) her Sunday School (religious class) teacher had taught her. Coming back to the review session, I asked why she used '**person**' and not '**it**', she explained '*last time when I was small, my father always tells us bedtime stories. Now my father tells Justine (her three-*

*year old brother) bedtime stories. But nowadays, he will listen to my mother complain the wrong things we do and he will scold us, especially Patrick (her eight-year old brother). But...er... I like it better when he uses the stories to ....to...to.... advise us especially parables and fables.....he always connect the stories to us.'* Table 4.5 summarises this and other connections made by my learners.

We get a glimpse of Jenitaa's home literacy practices. Compared to my other three learners, Jenitaa stands out in her contribution and participation throughout my study. She normally initiates a new idea and gets the conversation going. Talking to my other three learners, I found out that they hardly experienced a rich environment like Jenitaa. Thier home literacy practices are not really enveloped in a rich literate tradition. Jenitaa's advantage puts her several laps ahead of her friends in the composing journey.

Table 4.5: Other Connections learners made in relation to fables

Discoveries	Sample Data
Fables and parables are nearly same	<i>Fables and parables are the same. We kearn something at the end. (Jenitaa)</i>
Fables and some cartoons got connections	<i>Teacher some cartoon also give advice at the end of the show. Like Ninja turtle and Dinosaur cartoon. Is it also fable, teacher?</i>
Fables and fairy tales are different	<i>In the fable they write out the moral value but in fairy tale we must think of our own moral value. (Elena)</i> <i>Fairy tales are longer (Katrena) while fables are shorter (Erik)</i>
Fables also must have <i>head, body &amp; leg</i>	<i>Teacher is the moral value the leg of the essay?</i>

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(Jenitaa)	<i>Then the setting and character should be in the head of the essay and the event must be in the body (Jenitaa)</i>
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Erik asked if some of the cartoons he watches can be considered fable. When I asked him to explain further, he said that cartoons like Ninja Turtles, Dinosaurs and a few others had animal characters in them. They too *give advice* at the end of the show. *Is it also fable, teacher?* I was happy with his question because I could see that he was trying to make connections with things that surround his life. I see his question as clarifying his understanding of what a fable is. He seems to be reinforcing the generic features of a fable by asking questions.

I noticed that Katrena initially reached for *My Big Book of Favourite Fairy Tales* but placed it back and settled for *The Magic Pot*. When I asked her why she did so, she replied that it was *fairy tales not fables because got no moral value at the end*. I decided to follow it up. We sat around the big book of fairy tales and went over the story by going through the pictures.

<i>I</i>	:	<i>All this has got lesson at the end or not?</i>
<i>Erik</i>	:	<i>Yes (but he seemed unsure. The rest were silent).</i>
<i>I</i>	:	<i>OK, let's talk about Cinderella. What's the lesson at the end?</i>
<i>Elena</i>	:	<i>Do whatever your mother....no, your stepmother Tell you to do.</i>
<i>Katrena</i>	:	<i>No, don't listen to others</i>
<i>I</i>	:	<i>Cinderella was so obedient, so kind and finally at The end what happened?</i>
<i>Erik</i>	:	<i>She was married.</i>
<i>Elena</i>	:	<i>I know...I know... be good....be good...so you will....</i>
<i>Jenitaa</i>	:	<i>Be good and at the end you'll get the ...er...reward.</i>
<i>I</i>	:	<i>What about Red Riding Hood?</i>

*Elena* : *Do not simply trust other people.*  
*I* : *Snow White?*  
*Katrena* : *Do not take anything from people we don't know.*  
*Erik* : *Teacher, this (fairy Tales) also got lesson at the end, Fable also got lesson at the end, why same huh?*  
*Elena* : *That one (fairy tales) is human, this one (fables) is Animals*  
*Katrena* : *Some of the fable also got human also what. But the Animals are more.*  
*Erik* : *This one also got animals what - red riding hood*  
*I* : *So what's the difference?*  
*Katrena* : *Fairy Tales are longer*  
*Erik* : *Fables are shorter*  
*Jenitaa* : *The moral is faster*  
*Elena* : *in the fable they write out the moral value but in fairy Tale we must think of our own moral*  
*Katrena* : *Ya-lah like my Magic Pot.*

The detailed account thus far shows my four learners grappling with the finer details of fable. I could see the acquisition and integration of knowledge *of* fables and *about* fables. Moving from a fable being just *a story* (Erik) with *morality* (Jenitaa), the heightened awareness of the generic features and attributes of fables can be clearly seen in their discussion and interaction. This brings me to my first finding, that is, 'talk about text' during the learning about the genre fable helped learners to discover the generic features of fables for themselves instead of being told by the teacher. Instead of treating texts as merely comprehension passage, learning about the text makes them more sensitive towards the generic features of that particular text which in turn gives them the terminology to discuss fables. They now have the words to talk about the genre of the fable, what make a fable without which a text is not regarded as a fable.

Besides that, the fables have become environments for learning for my learners. They have become locations within which meaning is constructed. As Calkins (1994)

said, ' . . . when an entire class inquires into a genre, it is life-giving. It opens door and leaves a lot of room for variety and choice, while allowing the classroom community to inquire deeply into something together (p. 363). My learners were actively engaged as they reviewed their own work and the work of their friends. They told me that this was something they had never done in school so far and I believed them. During my years as a primary school teacher, I had never made my students review their or their peers' work. It was always, I alone who played the role of 'the guardian of the linguistic gates' (Richard-Amato, 1996) or an 'error hunter' (Samuel, 1988). Therefore, I decided to defer judgement because I think deferring judgement is an important teacherly act especially on emergent writers. Hence, both my students and I were able to experience the concept of discourse community which Johns (1997) talks about. She says that if there is one thing that most of the discourse community definitions have in common, it is an idea of language [and genres] as a basis for sharing and holding in common: shared expectations, shared participation, commonly (or communicably) held ways of expressing. My four learners now formed a fable discourse community, a knowledge community on fable, an inquiry community. Now that they had the terminology, the words, they were able to engage in a conversation around fables. And because they belonged to a community, they were able to 'take' from and 'share' with other people's writings.

Carter (2000) says that the process of response will be somewhat different when a child engages with text, a text in which language itself is in the foreground. "To engage with text means to take note of that text in terms both of its meaning and its materiality. There will, therefore, be appropriate and inappropriate ways of responding to text. To

disregard this in schools is to lose a great deal of the educational potential which a work possesses for children" (p. 21).

Lamott (1995) says that we must create situations where children have the opportunity to use language, to talk and to listen, to argue and agree. This means that we have to be willing to 'waste' a certain amount of time. I personally found this difficult because I have been schooled into the traditional way of being where the classroom must be quiet and not to waste time in the classroom. As such I had to keep a restraint on myself and then began to see that the discussions my learners had gave them the opportunity to use language in many ways to get things done and keep the learning going.

#### **4.2.3 Writing fables**

After the immersion and 'talk about text', I introduced to them six proverbs.

Proverbs are popular sayings that usually teach something. They are:

- (i) the early bird catches the worm,
- (ii) don't count your chicken before they hatch,
- (iii) look before you leap,
- (iv) don't judge a book by its cover,
- (v) honesty is the best policy and
- (vi) pride leads to a fall.

I discussed each one in length with them explaining the meaning and illustrating each proverb within a given situation to further enhance understanding as it is done in most of the Moral Education books.

Having established the generic features of the fable from the earlier sessions and to use the knowledge of fables, the learners were told to write a fable after choosing a proverb (Appendices D1, D2, D3 & D4). Copies of the learners' fables were made for the rest of the group. I went through the 'generic features of fable' chart before the peer revision session began. I intentionally inserted this peer review session because I wanted my learners to use the knowledge of fable to critically view their peers' essays. I wanted them to take charge of their own learning.

Besides that, Wells (1998) advises that 'to enhance the learners command of the genres concerned, it is valuable to set up active correspondence between genre-as-written and the genre-as-read because learning to read genres may give students clearer understanding of what is valued in writing. Rather than be given abstract list of criteria for effective writing, he believes that students can develop genre knowledge which would help them to arrive at judgements in the context of reading which will enhance their writing. Thus I felt that if they could identify the errors in their own work and the work of their friends, they will avoid making the same mistakes in future. I believe that this linking of knowledge, between the reading done and the writing produced, can be encouraged as part of students' reflection on their own, and their peers' writing as part of general feedback on writing. In this way I would not only focus on the learning and production of genres but would also be able to place more emphasis on contingent responsiveness to students' writing which would be multidirectional than merely focusing on formal instruction and correction which is unidirectional. Table 4.6 compares the learners first drafts and second drafts as well as the comments given during the peer



review session. Their comments reveal that they were actively making use of what they had learnt about the generic features of the fable

Table 4.6: Comparison of drafts 1 and 2

Participants	Drafts 1	Drafts 2	Comments On Drafts 2
	<u>Teacher's comments</u>	<u>Teacher's comments</u>	<u>Learners' Review</u>
Erik Elena Katrena	i. not original fables	i. No sense of story	♦ <i>Bad, don't make sense. the answer of the moral don't make sense (Erik)</i>
	ii. the essays were of average length	ii. Essays were original but shorter than drafts 1.	♦ <i>The story doesn't fulfill the fable things. The story doesn't answer to the moral value. (Jenitaa)</i>
	iii. only two students stated the moral value explicitly at the end.	iii. Explicitly stated the moral value at the end of the story.	♦ <i>It don't conclude all the things [ story doesn't match the moral value] (Elena)</i>
		iv. No sense of organisation	
Jenitaa		i. moral value fits the story	- <i>The moral value matches the story.</i>
		ii. essay is original	- <i>I like the story</i>
		iii. evidence of organisation.	- <i>The story is nice...everything fit properly</i>

Table 4.6 and the peer review session illustrate that Jenitaa was the only one who managed to successfully use the knowledge gained about the fable genre in writing her own fable. The other three learners do not show such transference of knowledge. This brings about my second finding that mere immersion in fables is insufficient in helping the learners write their own fables.

My first impression after my learners had written first draft was that they had a sense of fables. They started with the right introduction, the '*Once upon a time . . .*' structure and ended with a moral value. But their second draft made me realise that mere immersion is not sufficient. My learners were unable to write a coherent story that fit the moral value. Other than Jenitaa, the other three were unable to mix and match and adapt the fables they had read or heard. Jenitaa was the only one who managed to write the second draft of her fable with an easy flow of ideas. Her essay had a sense of story and the other three emergent writers 'felt' it too. Jenitaa showed that she was able to make connections with and draw upon her resources to create her essay. She was able to adapt quite easily the fables read to her to suit her story. But my other three learners did not display such mastery. They reported that they understood the proverb they had chosen but had difficulty creating their story (draft 2). Finally they just wrote a story although they knew the moral value did not fit. They knew they had to give me the essay the next day. Therefore they forced themselves to write. They were aware of the generic features of a fable, they were aware their stories were not fables, they were aware of their lackings. The knowledge of the generic features of fables did help them after all. They were not ignorant of their mistakes as happens in schools. They just lacked opportunities to practice. They need a transition period to fit this new knowledge of fables with their existing one, and to practice as they adjust and adapt. They know the genre of fable but they haven't learnt the skill to fit into their schemata. Considering writing is a difficult skill and furthermore a productive skill, my emergent writers found it difficult. The

acquisition of the generic features of the fable genre only required my learners' receptive skills during the stages of immersion and the 'talk about text' stage.

Although Calkins (1994), Daane (1991) and Chapman (1999) suggest that it is good to begin with immersion, I cannot agree with them. On the other hand, I concur with what Cazden (1993) says. She says that immersion in even the richest and most authentic communicative activities is not sufficient for many L2 learners. Immersion is necessary but not sufficient (p. 2). She changes the binary opposition into a continuum of implicit to explicit teaching by inserting between immersing and telling a third kind of pedagogical activity which she calls as revealing. I find this concept of 'revealing' powerful.

In my study, revealing acts as a powerful scaffold. According to Vygotsky, learners need adults or more capable peers to work within their learning zones to support and scaffold them until they can function independently, thus enabling them to move to a higher level in cognitive functioning. Since Jenitaa's essay was considered correct, I prompted my other learners to question her based on the difficulties they themselves faced. Katrena asked Jenitaa how she had got the idea for the essay because according to her, she knew the proverb she wanted to base her essay on and she also knew the meaning of the proverb but she did not know how to find a story to fit in. So she asked Jenitaa how she got the idea for the essay. Jenitaa replied that she had got the idea of the ring from the movie 'Lord of the Rings' which was in the cinemas at that time (December 2002 school holidays) and from the fable 'The Farmer and the Axe'. Jenitaa said that the girl she was referring to in the first paragraph of her essay was herself feeling bored

during the school holidays because her parents were not taking her and her siblings for a holiday. When I asked her why the setting was in the forest, she replied that it was because in the fable 'The Farmer and the Axe', the farmer was chopping wood in the forest. *'The farmer was honest', she said, 'and so he was rewarded with two axes, the silver and golden axe. So he went home with three axes. In my story, I also went home with 3 big sacks of gold and silver each.'* I see evidence of intertextuality. Caudrey (1998) says that when phrases, content, the sense of another story and other discourse features are borrowed and transferred into one's writing, it gets transformed in the process. To use concepts put forward by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1984), Jenitaa is moving towards the higher order skills involved in 'knowledge transforming'. She is taking ideas from around her and transforming them to make them her own.

Jenitaa as the more capable peer scaffolded the other three writing experiences when she revealed how she solved the problem of fitting the proverb to the story. Jenitaa 'revealed' how she got the idea for her story in second draft and my other three learners benefited from this revelation. They too employed Jenitaa's technique and their third draft showed much improvement. After listening to Jenitaa's sharing of the way she generated the ideas for the story as well as reviewing each others fable, they could 'see' the solution because learning to write can also come from seeing how other people write. Thus my learners' third draft showed them making use of their resources to generate ideas which facilitated the writing of their fable (draft 3) which had a sense of story that fits the moral. Table 4.7 below shows the resources my learners drew upon to get a sense of story in their fable (draft 3). As Carter (2000) says,

... it is often said that nobody ever really composes an original story. The tales children hear and read are of great value for their development as makers of stories themselves. (p.33)

He also adds that

...we should feel no inhibitions in our primary classroom about children retelling or rewriting stories they have heard or read. However, they should be encouraged to use their own words ... (p. 34).

Table 4.7: Fables Drawn Upon in Draft 3

<i><b>Draft 3</b></i>	<b>Title &amp; Moral of the Story</b>	<b>Fables</b>
Erik Appendix E1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Peacock and The Crow</li> <li>• Pride Leads to a Fall</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Crow That Wanted To Be White</li> <li>2. The Crow and The Crane</li> <li>3. The Hare and the Tortoise</li> <li>4. The Mosquito and The Lion</li> <li>5. The Vain Stag</li> </ol>
Jenitaa Appendix E2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Poor Woodcutter and the Birds</li> <li>• One Good Deed Deserves Another</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Woodcutter and The Three Axes</li> <li>2. The Ant and The Bird</li> <li>3. The Lion and the Mouse</li> </ol>
Katrena Appendix E3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lion's True Friend</li> <li>• A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Lion and The Mouse</li> <li>2. The Bear and the Three Friends</li> <li>3. The Bird and The Ant</li> </ol>
Elena Appendix E4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Snake and the Stupid Rhino</li> <li>• Look Before You Leap</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Wicked Frog</li> <li>2. The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing</li> <li>3. The Fox and the Stork</li> <li>4. The Crow and The Oyster</li> <li>5. The Lord of the Ring</li> </ol>

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) use the term scaffolding to describe a support system for helping children achieve success on a task that would be too difficult for them to accomplish on their own. I believe that genre approach is the support system. In this

genre approach to writing, my learners and I worked together in constructing 'a meaningful interaction around a common literacy event' (Vygotsky, 1978). My learners 'heard', read, wrote and reviewed fables.

So what genre approach to reading and writing offers is 'intellectual socialization' (Bruffee, 1984). Intellectual socialization, according to Bruffee (1984) may be accomplished not only by interacting with people, but also by encountering the writing of others. Jenitaa's fables were scrutinised and became a learning tool for others. From the work of Sommers (1980) and of Flower and Hayes (1981), I know that the writer must be able to read his/her own text while composing it. But Petrosky (1982) has suggested that the ability to read the works of others also affects a writer's composing processes. Petrosky says that the text of others become collaborators in the students' composing processes, stimulating critical reflection on composing. Jenitaa and her fable became the collaborators in my other three learners' composing process. Therefore models are then not treated as ideals, but as resources.

My 'assisted invitations' (Berthoff, 1981) or 'intellectual socialization' (Bruffee, 1984) was able to achieve its aim. My aim was not to liberate my students' writings from the influence of others' writing styles, but to make my students constructively conscious about the resources available to their own writing. This is my third finding: my learners became more conscious about the resources available to their own writing which helped them compose their own fable.

Then, from there we proceeded to comparing the shorter and longer version of the same fable, *The Hare and the Tortoise* (see Appendix L1 & L2). I told them to write on a

piece of paper which version they liked and to give the reason. As they compared and contrasted the fables, using their own writing experience as the basis, they were more sensitive towards the generic features of fables than they were during the immersion phase. Elena wrote, *I like the longer one better because it is more meaningful than the shorter one*' (see Appendix M4). What she means by meaningful is that *'it describe[s] more things'*. Jenitaa wrote that *'it's much more interesting'* (see Appendix M2). But what amazed me was what Katrena, the youngest in the group wrote (see Appendix M3). Table 4.8 tabulated the learners' responses after they were provided with fables.

Table 4.8: Provision of Models and Modelling before writing draft 3

Comparisons of Models (Appendix L1 & L2)	Modeling How the learners used the models provided.
<i>I like the longer one better because</i> - <i>it is describe more things than the shorter one</i> (Elena) - <i>it's much more interesting</i> (Jenitaa) - <i>it tell more things</i> (Erik)	- <i>I referred to the photocopy you gave us. I read it and then I read mine to see if it's the same.</i> (Jenitaa) - <i>I also teacher. I used the words from the fable into mine.</i> (Elena) - <i>I read the contoh you gave us and see if my one 'sound' like the contoh or not</i> (Elena)
Katrena coming to be aware that writing is recursive: <i>'I've seen that why I can't write the same type of things that the story writer writes. Because they practice and practice to write stories. But I never practice so I don't have the 'power' to concentrated on what I am writing.'</i>	

After second draft, I realised that my students needed not only an awareness of the generic features of fables but they need models as well to refer to and to practice writing fables. Models provide the sufficient input in linguistic knowledge to enable students to write successfully (Badger & White, 2000). Caudrey (1998) also states that the solution to the task can simply come from seeing the way the other students found solutions to the writing problem they faced. He says that whatever the source of 'solutions' the students see, students are able to get more out of looking at the texts prepared by others because they have already attempted the task themselves.

Having had meaningful revelations, my learners then embarked on their third attempt at fable writing. But this time they were given time to think about the fable, the characters, the moral value and the story. They discussed in class with each other and with me. They then presented the story-line to the rest and got their opinions. Explicit understandings of genre requirement made group sessions more productive as planning and drafting became cooperative activities.

Talking about what they intended to write made it easier for them to grasp and handle the complex task of writing. As Caudrey (1998) says, any given piece of writing is a communicative act. Oliver (1999), too, sees writing as both a social and personal activity. And a flexible view of genre approach provides a basis for discussing differences, similarities and changes in all kinds of texts and text-making. He also says that learning genre is not just a matter of assimilating linguistic knowledge from texts. It is clear that the kinds of dialogue and interaction which takes place 'around text' (Oliver, 1999) and the ways of 'talking into text' (Unsworth, 1997) as well as the 'talk about text'



(Chapman, 1999) contribute to an understanding about the genre being learnt. I noticed many changes and revisions in their story-lines as they discussed with their friends.

Besides having discussed the generic features of the story and the meaning of the proverb, they also returned home with both the photocopied fables of *The Hare and The Tortoise* (Appendix L1 & L2). Table 4.9 below depicts the changes in my learners text organisation and layout of their fable.

Table 4.9: Comparison of Learners Written Fables

	Draft 1 (Appendices C1 – C4) <u>The Tortoise and</u>	Draft 2 (Appendices D1 - D4) <u>The Dirty Boy</u>	Draft 3 (Appendices E1 - E4) <u>The Peacock and</u>
Erik	<u>The Rabbit</u>		<u>The Crow</u>
11			
Appendices C1, D1, E1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erik wrote the essay in <i>one paragraph</i> (13 lines).</li> <li>The <i>moral value</i> is <i>stated at the end</i> of the essay.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erik's essay was still in <i>one paragraph</i> only (8 lines).</li> <li>At the end of the essay, he <i>explicitly stated the moral value</i> of the story.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The essay is written in <i>two paragraphs</i> (3 and 15 lines respectively, a total of 18 lines).</li> <li>The <i>moral value</i> is <i>still explicitly stated</i> at the end of the essay.</li> </ul>
Jenitaa	<i>No Title</i>	<u>Honesty Is</u>	<u>The Poor Woodcutter</u>
11		<u>The Best Policy</u>	<u>and The Birds</u>
Appendices C2, D2, E2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her essay, '<u>The Country Mouse and the City Mouse</u>', was written in <i>five</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jenitaa has <i>four paragraphs</i> in her essay (18 lines).</li> <li>The <i>moral value</i> is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She still wrote her essay in <i>four paragraphs</i> (20 lines).</li> </ul>

	<p><i>paragraphs</i> (24 lines).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is <i>no moral value stated</i>.</li> </ul>	<p><i>the title</i> of her essay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This time the <i>moral value is stated at the end</i> of the essay.</li> </ul>
<p>Katrena 9 Appendices C3, D3, E3</p>	<p><u>The Ant and The Bird</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She wrote her essay in <i>three paragraphs</i> (12 lines).</li> <li>The <i>moral value is not stated</i> explicitly.</li> </ul>	<p><u>The Fat Boy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She wrote the whole fable in <i>two paragraphs</i> only (5 and 4 lines respectively, a total of 9 lines).</li> <li>At the end of the page, she <i>explicitly stated the proverb</i>, the moral of the story.</li> </ul>
		<p><u>The Lion's True Friend</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The essay is written in <i>four paragraphs</i> (3,6,3 and 1 lines respectively, a total of 13 lines).</li> <li>The <i>moral value is still stated explicitly</i> at the end of her composition.</li> </ul>
<p>Elena 10 Appendices C4, D4, E4</p>	<p><u>The Rabbit and The Tortoise</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The essay was written in <i>three paragraphs</i> 17 lines)</li> <li>She <i>states the moral value at the end</i> of the story.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Country Mouse and City Mouse</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elena's fable was written in <i>four paragraphs</i> (17 lines).</li> <li>She too <i>states the moral value</i> at the end of her essay.</li> </ul>
		<p><u>The Snake and The Stupid Rhino</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Her fable was written in <i>five paragraphs</i> (24 lines).</li> <li>She too <i>states the moral value</i> at the end of the lesson.</li> </ul>

There is a general sense of improvement in their third draft in terms of ideas, text organisation, paragraphing and a story that fits the moral value. This brings me to the fourth finding, that is, providing models and modeling in addition to immersion helped learners write better fables. My learners' essays (drafts 3) were much longer than the second drafts and their essays showed more originality. All of them had a title and the moral value stated explicitly at the end. And this time the story matched the moral value they had picked. Their own composed fables were now so similar to Aesop's fables. They have definitely shown much improvement. Although the length of composition alone is not necessarily of value, I see my learners' lengthier essays as an indication that they are confident enough of their writing to extend their thoughts on paper.

Another interesting thing I noticed was the tool they used to write their fables. Erik wrote his first and second draft in pencil. But compared to his first draft, his writing in the second draft appears light and frail. Perhaps this denotes his lack of confidence. His first draft was a *readymade fable*, as he called it. He was merely voicing someone else's story. However when he had to compose his own (second draft), he appears lacking in confidence. But his third draft is written in five different coloured pens. He said, '*I want my fable to be cantik-lah.*' [to look nice]. He seemed more confident now and he said it with such pride. Katrena's drafts also reveal similar findings. Her first and second drafts are written in pencils. But she prints well. However she chose to write her third essay using a blue pen and she wrote boldly. According to her, blue pen *can read better* and *look like big people writing*. Katrena too, like Irvin, is showing concern over the

appearance of her essay. This is probably because they have experienced some success in writing, a task they had difficulty with.

Therefore, after the learners had written their third drafts, I asked them how they felt. Jenitaa revealed that they have never written English essays in school thus far. They have only written Chinese essays with the guide that the essay should have a *head, body and leg*. She has done Bahasa Melayu essays but their '*cikgu [teacher] gives us the isi-isi penting (main points) for the three paragraphs in the body*'. Thus she was happy with her essays especially when the others praised hers as the best. Erik expressed something similar. '*I am proud with myself*', he said. '*I have never written a whole essay. I always only join the words under the pictures.*' According to him he never thought he could write something on his own. Elena, also from a Chinese school like Jenitaa, said that she found it tiring at first, as '*in school we never write so much*'. What she meant was that she never had to think so much to write in English. But she was happy with her third draft because '*it was my own story*'. Although Katrena goes to the national school, she had not done any essay writing in school as teachers only require them to write essays in standard four, 10 years old. As such she was quite amazed with her ability because she has *never written story before. Now I can write more*. My learners were able to create their own fable instead of merely re-voicing existing fables. This relates to my fifth finding, knowledge about the genre helped to empower learners.

This is the empowerment, (Wells (1998) talks about, that comes from engaging with texts epistemically: as reader or writer (particularly as writer). By conducting the transaction between the representation on the page and the representation in my learners'

heads, my learners could make intellectual advances that would otherwise be impossible to achieve if they had just read fables and answered comprehension questions or they had just joined the words below the pictures (figure 1, p.10). As Erik said, '*I am happy and bangga (proud) because I can do my own story*' With empowerment comes confidence.

*'I can never forget how to write fable'* exclaimed Erik, *'forever I can remember'*. I did not take this statement seriously at that time (December 2002 school holidays). It was not until several months later, however, that I realised how true his utterance was and how deeply the understanding of fable genre had impacted on Erik. From his mother I found out that Erik took part in the Moral Story Competition in his school in June 2003. He is normally not confident enough to participate in any competition. Apparently, with the sudden boost in English, the students were allowed to send in essays written in English. Erik had taken part in the competition and had won a consolation prize. Learning about fable genre empowered Erik and gave him the confidence he lacked.

#### 4.2.4 Insights

In this study on reading and writing fables, my four learners went through two phases of the genre approach, that is learning genre, in this case *learning the fable genre*, and learning about genre (*learning about the fable genre*) to develop their writing skills. My learners read fables, talked about fables and scrutinised fables before they wrote their own fables and went on to review their own and others' fables. They "read with a writerly eye and wrote with a readerly eye" (Lamott, 1995). On the whole, my learners perceived the genre approach to reading and writing as interesting and helpful in making them read

like a writer and write like a reader. I can thus conclude that the genre approach to reading and writing is a useful approach in improving their writing skills.

My findings also illustrate that reading is an effective scaffold for writing. Through immersing my learners in texts (read aloud), attending to its features (in shared reading), and examining models and modelling after the texts, my learners developed their writing with the support of the genre approach.

At the end of the *learning genre* and the *learning about genre* phase, after four carefully scaffolded lessons, my learners successfully and confidently composed their own, original fables (Appendices E1 - E4). They were not merely joining the words given to form sentences. They were writing fables and they were critiquing fables.

#### 4.3 Learning Through the Fable Genre

The second research question this study undertook was to find out whether learning through the fable genre helped support and extend learners' critical thinking.

According to Henry A. Taitt (1982),

*Tell a child what to think, and you make him a slave to your knowledge.  
Teach him how to think, and you make all knowledge his slave.*

Critical thinking is generally defined as a higher level thinking skill that involves reflecting, responding and decision making. Hamm (1994) in Ananda (2000) says that critical thinking occurs when students construct meaning by interpreting, analysing and manipulating information in response to a problem or question that requires more than a direct, one answer application of previously learned knowledge. Duzer and Florez (1999) state that critical literacy is a way of interacting with information that goes beyond the decoding of letters and words. It encourages learners to engage with information sources and to question the social contexts, purposes, and possible effects that they have on the learners' lives.

From my learners' responses and reflections, as I encouraged them to experiment within and beyond the textual boundaries and conventions of the fable genre, I found that learning through the fable genre:

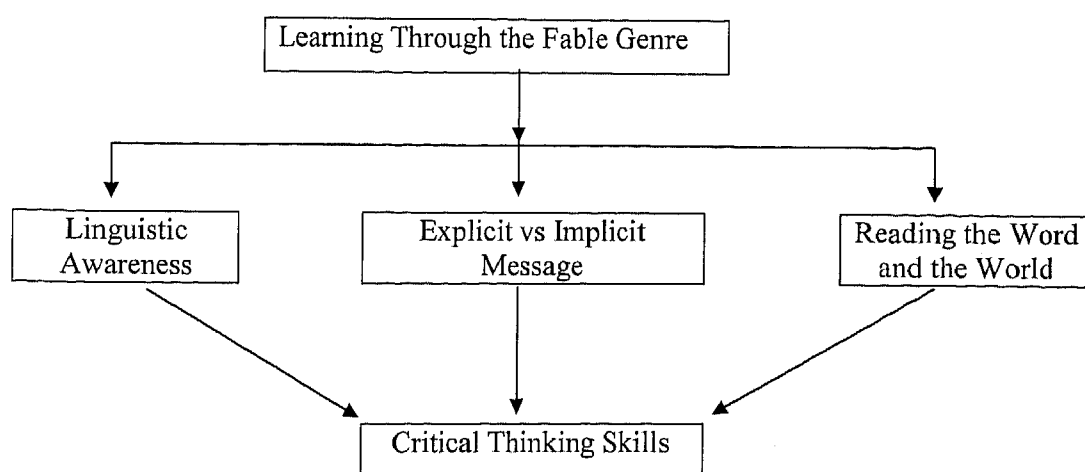
- i. helped to sensitize the learners to be more linguistically aware of the way pronouns were used to create certain effects like gender difference.
- ii. helped learners to see the implicit message and not merely the explicit message.

- iii. helped learners to go beyond the surface meaning of a text by exploring its creation and eventual interpretation.

The fables (*The Hare and The Tortoise*, *The Crow That Wanted To Be White* as well as *The Crow and The Peacocks*) which I used as springboards for discussions formed the framework within which I stimulated my learners' imagination and helped them develop their critical thinking skill.

I start off by explaining what the children were actually asked to do and how it led to the findings for the second research question. From these findings I attempt to identify the critical thinking skills that surfaced during the discussions. Figure 5 represents my framework for using fables to promote thinking skills.

Figure 5: Learning through the Fable Genre





#### 4.3.1 Linguistic Awareness

*The Hare and The Tortoise* was one of the many fables read during phase two, the learning about the fable genre. During this first reading, this fable was treated as any other fable where my learners scrutinised the genre and picked out the attributes of the fable. I decided to use the same fable again because this time I wanted to 'problematise' (Freire, 1973 in Graves, 2000 p.20) the text. I wanted to 'make strange the familiar'. I wanted them to 'see with new eyes'. I wanted them to see for themselves how critical reading can be enlightening. Thus, I broadened the area of fable to include the issue of gender difference.

Hence, when my learners read *The Hare and The Tortoise* (see Appendix L1) the second time, they had a different task to accomplish. They were given highlighter pens to highlight the pronouns '*he, she, his and her*'. They were then asked to identify the gender of the animals, where the hare was the male while the tortoise was the female. I then set them a task where they discussed how they felt reading with gender being 'marked' compared to the earlier reading they had to do (textual analysis) for the first research question. I asked them how they felt now that the tortoise, representing the female gender, wins. Please see Appendix Q1 for an excerpt of our discussion.

My learners were given another text on *The Hare and the Tortoise* (see Appendix L2) and again were asked to highlight the pronouns '*he, she, his and her*'. But this time, the writer only uses 'he' to refer to both the tortoise and the hare. Once again I asked them how they felt now that both the animals are of the same gender. Please refer to Appendix

Q2 for an excerpt of the discussion. Table 4.10 presents the critical analysis of the use of pronouns in both the fables.

Table 4.10: Critical Analysis of the Use of Pronouns.

The Hare and the Tortoise	Data Sample	Critical Thinking Skill
<p>Appendix L1 (with gender marked)</p> <p>he - hare - male</p> <p>she - tortoise - female</p>	<p><u>Excerpt A (Appendix Q1)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>making the girl win....</i>(Elena)</li> <li>- <i>making the girl better</i> (Katerina)</li> <li>- <i>'it' can use for boy and girl. But 'he' is only for boy and 'she' is only for girl.</i> (Jenitaa)</li> <li>- <i>if the writer use 'it' then we don't know if girl win or boy win</i> (Erik)</li> </ul>	<p>Making Associations &amp; Connections</p> <p>Evaluation &amp; Provision of Evidence</p>
<p>Appendix L2 (with gender unmarked)</p> <p>he - hare &amp; tortoise</p>	<p><u>Excerpt B (Appendix Q2)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>anyone win also okay</i> (Erik)</li> <li>- <i>don't want anyone to think they're better ... who is better...who is boasting ...</i>(Elena)</li> <li>- <i>in the first one the writer purposely want to show how..... that the girl is better</i> (Jenitaa)</li> </ul>	<p>Analysis for Bias</p> <p>Making Inferences</p>

My learners' observation in Table 4.10 shows that they are aware of gender differentiation. Erik's and Jenitaa's comments in Table 4.10 indicate that both of them are becoming aware of gender differentiation in lexical choice. They are able to make

association. They said that if they were to write the story, they would opt for 'it'.

Cameron (1990) made a similar observation. She points out one of the strategies for avoiding the use of generic masculine or feminine pronouns is to substitute *one* or *one's* or to use *their*. During our discussion, Jenitaa showed an understanding of this strategy. She explained that she would use 'it' because *the hare and the tortoise are animals... no need to use 'he' or 'she'*. Jenitaa and Erik displayed a fair appreciation of critical awareness in relation to gender differences in language use compared to Elena and Katerina. But Elena's remark '*don't want anyone to think they're better*' shows her applying the 'analysis for bias', one of the critical thinking skills.

When I asked them which one they preferred, Erik said that he preferred the one with the gender unmarked (see Appendix L2). '*It never tell who will win at last...er....no....it never tell whether that one is a female or male*,' Erik commented, '*in the other one* (see Appendix L1, with gender marked), *the girl will win at last. I don't like that*'. Katerina and Elena insisted that they preferred the one with gender marked because *the girl wins*. Both these girls said that they have older brothers who bully them. As such they were very firm with their choice. Erik, on the other hand, has an older sister and younger brother. His sister Isabel, is a very accommodating girl who gives in to Erik. So he too was very firm with his choice. All three of them compared the fables, evaluated them and chose the version they liked. They justified their choices. Jenitaa, is the eldest in her family. She has two adopted younger brothers. She said that it did not matter to her which version was better because the message "*Don't Boast*" was in both the versions and

that the moral value was of more importance than gender difference. Her acute awareness of fables enabled her to see beyond the gender difference to the purpose of a fable.

I have encouraged my learners to critically read, analyse and respond to the way language is used in texts they read. I created a space for critical discourse analysis in which students can respond to issues about the power of one's language choice. This brought about my first finding, that is, learning through the fable genre helped to sensitize the learners to be more linguistically aware of the way pronouns were used to create certain effects like gender difference.

This emphasis on the pronoun 'he/she' and 'him/her' also brought about another discovery through Jenitaa. Jenitaa initiated the prediction of the gender of the author. Please see Appendix Q3 for an excerpt of the discussion. Table 4.11 shows the learners' exploration of the gender of the author based on the pronouns 'he/she' and 'his/her' in the fable.

Table 4.11: Speculation of the Gender of the Author

Gender of the Author and Reasons for the Prediction	Critical Thinking Skills
<i>The Hare and the Tortoise</i> ( with gender marked)  - I think this writer is a girl..maybe Enid Blyton or Enid Blyton's sister or girl cousin...or anyone ...girl (Jenitaa) - Girl writer - the girl wrote it-lah because she made the girl win at last (Erik, Elena & Katerina)	Making Prediction Making Inferences Drawing Conclusions

<p><i>The Hare and the Tortoise</i> ( with gender unmarked)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>must be a man .... Because both win..</i> (Katerina)</li> <li>- <i>cannot be girl-lah..... because he make the hare and tortoise ... a boy. If girl writer...er...the hare and tortoise will be girl also-lah...</i> (Erik)</li> <li>- <i>the man want to show that ... he want to show that you cannot boast....he don't want to show girl winning or boy winning</i></li> <li>- <i>the same person</i> (Jenitaa) but doesn't mention the gender</li> </ul>	<p>Prediction</p> <p>Making Inferences</p> <p>Drawing Conclusions</p>
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Erik, Elena and Katerina maintained that the writer of the fable with gender marked (see Appendix L1) is definitely a girl '*because they say that the girl will win at last*'. '*The girl wrote it-lah because she made the girl win at last*'. Although Jenitaa was the first one to mention that the fable (with gender marked) was written by a girl, she later changed her mind and said that perhaps the writer of both the fables was the same person but she makes no reference to the gender of the writer. Then she changed her mind again and said that the writer might be a 'he' as seen in the excerpt below.

- Jenitaa : *This is the first story* (Appendix L1, with gender marked) *he wrote... and the writer thought that ...it's very....you know....he has his own original set....but he printed it out already*
- Me : *umm*
- Jenitaa : *And then he saw that ....her.... and ...she.... the girls win....so he gave it another.....ending....*
- Me : *... 'he!' ...now you're saying that the writer is 'he'. Who do you think the writer is?*
- Elena : *Maybe it's a 'he'*
- Erik : *the 'he' made the 'she' win huh?*
- Jenitaa : *Maybe*
- Me : *Why do you say so?*

Jenitaa : *Maybe the writer was small [she actually meant young] he was...maybe he ....*  
 Erik : *...he liked girls*  
 (everybody laughs)  
 Jenitaa : *Maybe.... When he became older, he wrote the second one He think maybe it's fair to make both equal.*

Erik disagreed when Jenitaa and Elena mentioned the possibility that the author of *The Hare and the Tortoise* with gender marked was a male. He questioned with disbelief, 'the 'he' made the 'she' win huh?' He too did not agree with Jenitaa's reasoning that the author might have been young. He gave his own reason, *maybe he liked girls*. This remark shows how Erik is projecting himself onto the situation. He too probably does the same 'things' to please 'girls'. If before he vehemently disagreed with Jenitaa over the possibility of the author being a male, he now seems to consider the possibility of the author being a male with his remark '*he liked girls*'.

This exploration is of great significance since in explaining the reasons for their opinions and speculating about the author of the texts, my learners made use of several critical thinking skills. My learners revealed a great deal about the ways in which they were interacting within and beyond the text. The learners predicted the gender of the author and supported their predictions with reasons they saw fit. Table 4.11 and the excerpt above show the learners' critical exploration of the gender of the author. This further strengthened my first finding that is, learning through the fable genre helped to sensitize the learners to be more linguistically aware of the way pronouns were used to create certain effects like gender difference.

### 4.3.3 Explicit vs Implicit Message

Although the emphasis was on the use of the pronouns 'he/she' and 'his/her' in the fable, I gleaned another insight. My learners told me that they saw two messages; one explicitly stated and the other implicitly stated. Please see Appendix Q4 for an excerpt of our discussion which illustrates this. Table 4.12 indicates the learners interpretation of the implicit and explicit messages.

Jenitaa was again transferring her knowledge about fable from the earlier readings into this situation. She said '*one message is at the bottom*'. Yet she goes on to infer another message. Jenitaa shows she is capable of much sophisticated thinking.

Table 4.12: Explicit and Implicit Messages in Fables

The Hare and the Tortoise	Explicit Message	Implicit Message	Critical Thinking Skills
	the moral value	Inferred by Learners	
Appendix L2 (with gender unmarked)	- doing something slowly and steadily can still bring goods results	- <i>the normal (L2) fable got one message only but this one (L1) got two message ...one message is at the ...er... bottom, the moral value.... The second message is ...female is better.... (Jenitaa)</i>	Making Inferences  Making Associations & Connections
Appendix L1 (with gender marked)	- slow and steady can win the race	- <i>No, here also got two message (L2). The first message is the moral value.....[second message is] the female and male can't boast....cannot....er...they are same.....ya...equal...they are equal. (Erik)</i>	Drawing conclusions  Making Analysis

My learners were able to see beyond the explicitly stated moral value which is located clearly *at the bottom of the fable* to the implicit message, that is "*girls are better*" (see Appendix L1) and "*both girls and boys are equal*" (see Appendix L2) which is 'between the lines'. Please see Appendices Q1-Q4, for the excerpts of our discussion.

My learners found this critical reading enlightening because "*it was a new way of reading because they don't read this way in school*" (Elena). In school, they only read to answer comprehension question. This *new way of reading* enabled my learners to 'read with new eyes'.

This led to my second finding, that is, learning through the fable genre helped learners see the implicit message and not merely the explicit message.

Now that they have become aware of the difference made by lexical choice (pronouns he/she & his/her), speculated the gender of the author and the message(s) in fables I made them read a third version, a revised and extended version of *The Hare and The Tortoise* (see Appendix N), an article from the Internet. It also appeared in page 23 of StarMag on Sunday, 12 January 2003 with the title *How To Ace The Race*. I had to read and explain to them the gist of the story and the five different moral endings because the language was of a much higher level. However they were able to handle the ideas mentioned above.

From the original moral 'slow and steady wins the race', the fable goes on to show the hare winning the race with the moral value, 'fast and consistent will always beat the slow and steady'. But the fable doesn't end there. The tortoise strategises and wins again highlighting the moral that 'first identify your core competency and then change the



playing field to suit your core competency'. The story still has not ended. The tortoise and the hare becoming good friends decide to run together instead of against each other. The moral of the story, 'it's good to be individually brilliant and to have strong core competencies; but unless you're able to work in a team and harness each other's core competencies, you'll always perform below par because there will always be situations at which you'll do poorly and someone else does well'. From teamwork the author goes on to highlight the moral that 'when we stop competing against the situation, we perform far better'. Table 4.13 shows the learners critical analysis of the use of pronouns in *How to Ace the Race*.

Table 4.13: Critical Analysis of the Use of Pronouns in *How to Ace the Race*.

Gender Specific	Data Sample	Critical Thinking Skill
Appendix N How to Ace the Race (extended version) he - hare and tortoise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>the author wants to be fair</i> (Erik)</li> <li>- <i>doesn't want anybody to feel hurt</i> (Katerina)</li> <li>- <i>both the animals together win at last</i> (Jenitaa)</li> </ul>	Inference Justification

'What do you think of this revised version?' I asked. Erik commented that the person who wrote this piece must be *thinking about two things that is: first the tortoise wins then he makes the hare win and he wants to be fair*. Katerina quickly agreed saying '*the writer doesn't want anyone to feel hurt, so he makes both win*'. When I asked them why they felt that way, they replied that in *The Hare and The Tortoise* (see Appendix

L1), *the tortoise was a girl and she won. The hare was a boy and he lost. So in this story the writer made each win one time.* The learners' remarks show them making inferences, interpretations and drawing conclusions. These are part of the critical thinking skills.

Comments like *'wants to be fair, doesn't want to hurt anybody'* shows the learners putting themselves in others' shoes. Earlier Erik remarked, *'... the girl will win at last. I don't like that'* and now he says *'wants to be fair'*. His comments show that he is making connections between the fable and his lifeworld where equal treatment is important.

Table 4.14: Speculation of the Gender of the Author of *How to Ace the Race*

Gender of the Author and Reasons for the Prediction	Critical Thinking Skill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>equal writer</i> (Erik)</li> <li>- <i>cannot be Enid Blyton because she would have stopped with girl winning</i> (Jenitaa)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">Inference</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Provision of evidence</p>

Table 4.14 shows the learners speculation of the gender of the author of *How to Ace the Race*. Jenitaa mentioned *'I feel that this author is not the author who wrote the earlier version, can't be Enid Blyton. . . .this author is more intelligent than Enid Blyton because **he** can continue the story and make one by one animal win.'* I asked Jenitaa why she referred to the writer as 'he' and why couldn't it have been a 'she'. She replied *'because if Enid Blyton she would have stopped at the tortoise winning the second time. So it must be a man writer'* she said. *'I think this is a equal writer,'* blurted Erik. I asked Erik why he said so. He explained that *'the writer made both of them win at last'*. Erik

and Jenitaa were analysing the intent of the writer. They were using critical thinking skills. They were evaluating this extended version of *The Hare and the Tortoise* based on reasoned judgement before voicing out their opinions.

Then I pointed out to them that in this extended version, both the tortoise and the hare are boys. The writer uses 'he' for both. They were surprised because they had just overlooked it while they were reading. The only thing in their mind at that time was the earlier reading they had done with gender marked. Jenitaa also added that the writer was probably thinking of the message only.

All these ideas did not surface during our first reading of both the versions of the fable *The Hare and The Tortoise*. So when teachers limit texts as comprehension passages only, the students are neither nudged nor encouraged to develop critical thinking skills. Schools are sites in which students can be and should be encouraged to think critically. And story is the most powerful means for teaching anything. As Carter (2000) says, 'for a story to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect . . . (p. 29). I have planted in my learners seeds of gender differentiated language and they have given me a glimpse of what they are capable of should they be challenged to think critically.

This supports my argument that learning through the fable genre offers positive alternatives to help support and extend critical thinking. The children's interaction with the text and each other revealed their growing critical awareness. This suggests that their

reading experience should be totally different given that critical thinking skills is part of the syllabus.

Looking at the 'familiar in unfamiliar ways' is a critical part of learning. Chapman (1999) says that imaginative narratives need not be limited to fiction and fantasy. They can also relate to real life and important social issues. Students' understanding of social issues can be deepened when they take on multiple roles and also when they are engaged in multiple ways of reading. Instead of reading fables as merely comprehension passages, the critical way of reading that I employed in my study helped my young learners to recognise gender differences and discuss it critically. My aim was to get them to use higher order/critical thinking skills and they proved they could handle it.

#### **4.3.4 Reading The Word and the World**

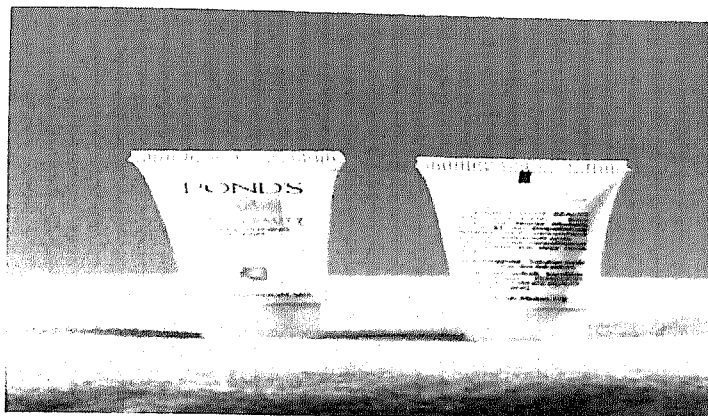
Lull (1990) says that intellectual competence may also be demonstrated, either by vocally challenging information imparted or opinions expressed by people on television or other forms of media. In an attempt to encourage Lull's intellectual competence, I used fables in the hope of helping to extend and support my learners' critical thinking as media plays a big role in their lives. I borrow Freire's (1985) concept from reading the world and reading the word.

The learners were given two fables to read; *The Crow That Wanted to Be White* as well as *The Crow and the Peacocks* (see Appendix L3 & L4). The fables have the following moral value, 'we must accept what we are born with and we should not try to cheat others by pretending to be what we are not. We may end up hurting ourselves.'

Before I carried on further, I asked them if these two fables were relevant for us. I asked, *'Do you think it is important for us to read this fable?'* They said, *'No'*. *'Are we like the crows sometimes?'* I asked. Erik, Katerina and Elena said, *'no'* but Jenitaa said *'yes'*. She explained, *'Some people are ugly...when they see beautiful people, they also want to be beautiful. So they do something to make them beautiful.'* Jenitaa's comment opened the avenue for more discussions. Please see Appendix Q5 for the excerpt of the discussion.

My learners were then given a tube of Pond's facial whitening cream (Figure 6). I asked them to read the information printed on the tube. When I asked them what they understood by *WHITE BEAUTY*, Jenitaa said that white is beautiful. She compared it to wedding gowns and said that brides look beautiful in white gowns. I asked them to look at the tube and read the line below *WHITE BEAUTY* which was *SKIN LIGHTENING CREAM*. They asked me what lightening was. I told them that the root word is 'light' in the hope they might guess the meaning. *'Not heavy'* uttered Elena. Seeing that she did not understand, I then proceeded to explain the meaning of lightening, that is to make something fair, lighter in colour. I took two colour pencils and gave them a visual clue - dark blue and light blue. They understood the meaning. Jenitaa asked if this Pond's White Beauty cream (see Appendix H) was like the Fair and Lovely cream that is often advertised on television. I could see that she was making connections with things that she encounters in her everyday life.

Figure 6: Pond's White Beauty



The excerpt below shows my learners critically reading the information on the tube. For the complete excerpt, please see Appendix Q6.

Figure 7 : Talk Analysing Pond's White Beauty

Excerpts of Discussions		Critical Thinking Skills
Me:	<i>Why do you think they have this message there at the bottom of the tube?</i>	Making Inferences
Jenitaa:	<i>So you can buy it. When you buy this cream for the face, they also want you to buy the facial soap</i>	
Elena	<i>May be ....er...they want to tell you they also got sell it.</i>	
Me:	<i>Oh, can you tell me more?</i>	Comparing and contrasting
Elena:	<i>it's like book-lah teacher. You know when you buy book, at the back they put the picture of other book also. So you can see which one you not yet read and can buy the book and read.</i>	
Erik:	<i>Teacher, sometimes when we buy the CDs for the play-station, they also put picture of other games also. Then we can see and buy if we want.</i>	Making Associations & Connections

Then I passed them magazines to locate any advertisement on skin whitening creams. We then sat around the magazine and scrutinised the advertisement, Figure 8 (see Appendix P1).

Figure 8: Pond's Facial Cream

You're exposed to the sun's UV rays 7 days a week.  
Some UV rays can even penetrate glass.  
Direct exposure can cause your skin to burn.

Still think you don't need protection?

Unless you come out of the house only at night, skin protection is a must.  
Overexposure to the sun's UV rays can damage skin. And the fact that your skin is the largest and one of the most important organs in your body makes protection all the more vital.  
That's why Pond's Institute has created New Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer. It contains Double Sunscreen Protection to shield your skin from the sun's harmful Ultraviolet rays.

**UVA and UVB protection**  
The UV rays that have damaging effects on your skin are UVA and UVB. UVA rays, present in the sunlight we're exposed to, can pass through glass and penetrate deep into the skin, causing it to darken immediately, and gradually sag and wrinkle.  
UVB rays are the sun's burning rays. Overexposure can lead to sunburn.  
In extreme cases, UVA and UVB have been known to cause skin cancer as well.  
Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer is formulated to shield both UV bands from penetrating the skin, hence protecting it from aging and burning due to sunlight. Just remember that Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer is not meant for prolonged hours under the sun. If you plan to go sunbathing, you still need a proper sun block lotion.

Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer also contains other skin enhancing properties. One of which is Vitamin B3 – a natural ingredient that gently lightens your skin.  
Obtained from plant extracts, it regulates the production of melanin (your skin's darkening agent). Once melanin is reduced, coupled with the renewal of your skin cells, you will get fairer skin naturally. And in just 6 weeks.  
Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer also comes with a new Skin Smoother that deeply nourishes your skin, giving you a smooth and healthy looking complexion.  
Try it today, unless you can avoid the sun for the rest of your life.

**SAVE RM2.00**  
on the purchase of Pond's Skin Lightening Moisturizer.  
(Applicable for 50g cream and 70ml lotion)  
Offer valid from 1 Sept till 31 Oct.  
Please present coupon during purchase at any of these participating outlets:  
Georgetown Pharmacy • Watsons • Guardian • Procter & Gamble • Macare

**POND'S**  
SKIN LIGHTENING  
MOISTURIZER CREAM  
With Vitamin B3  
& Skin Smoother

**POND'S INSTITUTE**

GEORGETOWN  
WATSONS  
GUARDIAN  
PRAXI health  
MACARE

Figure 9: Talk Beyond Fable

Excerpts of Discussions		Critical Thinking Skills
Me:	<i>OK, now look at this page (Appendix Q1). What can you tell me about this page?</i>	
Jenitaa:	<i>This small picture here look like in my Science book.. [the picture of sun shining on skin]</i>	Intertextuality
Me:	<i>Oh, can you tell me more.</i>	Comparing & contrasting
Jenitaa:	<i>In my Science book, the sun will shine and the 'sinaran' (rays) will come to our Earth. The 'atmosfera' (atmosphere) will block some 'sinaran' and 'pantul' it back.</i>	Interpreting Giving justification Activation of prior Knowledge
Me:	<i>Oh, this looks like a Science text to you?</i>	
Jenitaa:	<i>Yes.</i>	
Me:	<i>Why do you think they put it this way?</i>	
Jenitaa:	<i>Looks like Science book...so...they ...er ... think people will believe faster</i>	Making Inferences
Me:	<i>OK, the rest. What do you see in the text?</i>	
Erik:	<i>I see the tube you gave us just now, but some of the words are not the same. They write POND'S SKIN LIGHTENING MOISTURIZER CREAM. The tube you show us is written POND'S WHITE BEAUTY SKIN LIGHTENING CREAM. But the one in the book is better.</i>	Comparing & contrasting Making judgements
Me	<i>Why?</i>	
Erik	<i>At the bottom of the tube, they write 'with Vitamin B3 &amp; Skin Smoother'. Vitamin is good what, teacher.</i>	Making Associations & Connections Justifying Reasons
Me:	<i>Ok, good. Now Elena, what can you tell me about this page?</i>	
Elena:	<i>At the bottom of the page they tell us where we can buy this Cream.</i>	
Me:	<i>Where can you buy this cream?</i>	
Elena:	<i>in George Town, Watsons, Guardian, PRIIMAhealth and Farmasi Vitacare.</i>	Analysing the Page
Me:	<i>Why do you think they put it there?</i>	
Elena:	<i>So not difficult ...er...if you want to buy, you can go easier...no need to susah, susah cari [not difficult to find]</i>	
Me:	<i>What else?</i>	



Elena:	They want us to buy this cream. You see ....they say <b>SAVE 2..00</b> . They also make the writing big and 'gelap' (bold).	Application of Visual Literacy Inferring
Me:	Katerina, you got nothing to say?	
Katerina:	They all say everything already. I only got one thing to say.	
Me:	What is it?	
Katerina:	I like the colour. I like pink colour.	
Me:	Why do you think they made this page pink colour?	Application of Visual Literacy Semiotics
Katerina:	Pink colour is for girls. This cream is for girls. So they make pink colour-lah.	
Me:	Who told you that pink colour is for girls?	Making Connections to Real World Experiences
Katerina:	When my baby brother born ...ha....my aunty buy blue colour clothes for him. She tell me that blue colour is for baby boy and pink colour is for baby girl.	

My learners' discussion demonstrates quite clearly that they were very conscious of the persuasive quality of the advertisements. They thought that the people who produce the tube and the advertisements are '*very clever to make people buy*'. It was also obvious that the children knew how people can be manipulated by the advertisers.

Katerina's remark showed she was aware of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and of their meaning and use. I followed up on Katerina's comment because Goodman (1996) says that texts communicate to us in new ways - through graphics, pictures, colour and layout techniques, as well as through words. Texts in English are likely to contain many forms of 'visual English'. She also goes on to say that some forms of communication require visual literacy, some verbal literacy and some a combination of the two. The way things look is of critical importance. Colour in this case is associated with promotion and popularization.


My learners answers reflect their developing view and critical thinking of the power of media in influencing and persuading. What is significant here is not so much the accuracy of their observations, as the awareness of visual and verbal literacy which Goodman (1996) calls visual English. She says that texts use devices from more than one semiotic mode of communication. She says that the ways in which visual and verbal English interact within a text reinforces each others' messages. Thus she says that there is a need for visual literacy. This is something not done in schools.

To encourage this interaction of the visual and verbal elements I showed them another advertisement (Figure 10 or Appendix P2). Again we sat in a circle and scrutinised the page.

Figure 10: Eversoft Advertisement

Introducing **Eversoft** WHITE

**Prevents • Protects • Whitens**




EVERSOFT WHITE is specially created for the modern woman whose skin is constantly exposed to the damaging effects of our environment - the sun, air and pollution. Major factors that accelerate premature ageing and stimulate the formation of melanin resulting in freckles, dark spots and dull dehydrated skin.

EVERSOFT WHITE contains natural whitening ingredients like Mulberry and Licorice, Vitamins C and E plus UV Filters in a uniquely balanced combination that works, within days, to give you visibly fairer, brighter, more luminous skin. Even your friends will notice the difference.

All it takes is just 3 natural steps every day: cleanse, tone, moisturise  
for skin that stays beautifully smooth, naturally fair.

Clinically tested effectiveness: A clinical test\* conducted on young women using the moisturising cream showed that after 4 weeks: 94% showed an increase in skin lightness and 80% had a reduction in melanin level.  
\* Clinical study conducted by Advanced Biochemical Technology Centre, PERIM, using EVERSOFT WHITE Whitening Moisturising Cream.



**A Natural Way to Whitening**

Jenitaa asked me if whitening and lightening is the same to which I replied yes. Katerina said that the page is white and not pink because of the last line at the page 'A Natural Way to Whitening'. 'So it must be white', she insisted. When Erik pointed out that there were little bits of green, Katerina acknowledged it and said that *because the things they sell is white bottle with green writing. That is why they put the page also little bit green and lot of white.*

As Goodman (1996) says, we not only need to know how to read the word but also the 'world' because images and colours, like words and sentences are open to more than one interpretation. Therefore I got them to scrutinise another advertisement (Figure 11 or Appendix P3).

Figure 11: Clinique Advertisement



When I asked them to think about the choice of a using a boxing glove, Erik quickly answered, *'to box away all the black. Can make the white win.'* Elena, following Katerina, commented, *'this page is white and .....er.....the boxing glove is white and black. .... same with the cream. ....er....the cream is in a white bottle with black writing. So they make the colour of the page same as the colour of the bottle.'* Teacher', Jenitaa, who was silent, uttered, *'I know why they use the picture of the glove. They use because they write there 'Take action'. Boxing got lot of action one.'*

So far the responses I have reported show that there is a clear divergence between the reading done in school and this type of extensive reading. My learners' responses imply that the type of extensive reading done here fulfills the 'reading' they have to do in the real world; real reading, critical reading. The reading done in school, merely fulfills the examination needs. I feel this mismatch need to be looked at because these four learners prove that they are capable of critical and intellectual thinking.

To frame the discussion and to connect the advertisement to the fable, I asked them what message is conveyed through the three advertisements as well as the tube of Pond's Whitening cream. They were silent for a while. Jenitaa then said, *'if you want to be beautiful, use this cream and you can become white and beautiful.'* Once again I repeated the question I had earlier asked, *'Are these two fables on the crows relevant for us? Do you think it is important for us to read this fable?'* This time they said 'Yes'. This brings me to my third finding, that is, learning through the fable genre helped my learners to go beyond surface meaning of texts by exploring its creation and eventual interpretation. My learners not only read the word but also the world.

#### 4.3.4 Insights

Comber (1997) claims that critical literacy content ought to stem from participants' lives and this should be used as a springboard for dialogue. I saw that if learners were given the space in which to think and rethink, a place to voice out and be heard, a place where they are not continually silenced but continually challenged to engage in critical thinking, they will become critical thinkers and critical consumers. In this study, talk about fable, talk around fable, talk into fable and talk beyond fables have shown tremendous positive results.

Schools promote learning and learning involves reading. In the information world and in the meaning-making system, reading is important. Schools teach the 'exam' method but there is a tension between reading in schools and reading out of schools. Reading in schools is driven by academic needs but reading out of schools is driven by real life needs. There is a tension between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. Reading in schools ought to prepare the learners for the real world. Taking the reading done in schools one step further by connecting them with the real world is making them think critically and bridge the word and the world.

By using fables as springboards for discussion, I have shown that texts can be used to mediate personal and societal attitudes. As Robinson (1988) says, texts that are shared and the act of making and using meaning from texts will offer learners a site for growth and change the way they think. This is evident from the ways my children drew on textual evidence and the connections they made beyond the text to grapple with critical thinking.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed how my learners learned the fable, learned about the fable (its features) and learned through the fable (gender awareness as well as consumerism and media awareness).

This fable study was situated within the context of the topic on animals in KBSR syllabus. It was also socially situated. My learners and I worked as a community and my learners collaborated in various ways. This learning was active. My learners were engaged in listening, speaking, reading and writing and most importantly making connections.