ASIAN JOURNAL OF THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING VOLUME 4 ■ NUMBER 4 ■ DEC 2014

COMMENTARY

Encouraging student talk as a 21st century competency

Peter TEO[1]

[1] Department of English Language & Literature
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Address for Correspondence: Associate Professor Peter Teo, Department of English Language & Literature, National Institute of Education, 1 Nanyang Walk, Singapore 637616.
Email: peter.teo@nie.edu.sg

Recommended citation:
Teo, P. (2014). Encouraging student talk as a 21st century competency. *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *4*(4), 206-219.
https://doi.org/10.24112/ajsotl.43317

Encouraging student talk as a 21st century competency

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how teachers can increase student participation and encourage more substantive student talk. It argues that, together with other competencies deemed vital in the 21st century landscape, effective oral communication is in need of attention at all levels of education, including the tertiary. The paper draws its data from a research project investigating the discourse in pre-university classrooms, looking specifically at the ways in which teachers can promote a higher quality of student talk and level of cognitive engagement. The paper highlights some pertinent preliminary findings and makes some recommendations for educators to be more cognisant of the dynamics of classroom talk as a way not only to encourage students to participate more actively but to produce a more dialogic and interactive environment. This would go some way towards developing more articulate, confident, engaged and fundamentally more effective communicators and active citizens among our students.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the printed word has enjoyed a pre-eminent and privileged position compared to other modes of meaning-making, such as speaking. This is due to the emphasis accorded to writing which has to be formally learnt in school as opposed to speech which is naturally acquired (Barthes, 1977). This ascribed prestige that writing possesses privileges those who are able to master the craft of effective writing which, much more than their ability to speak well, predisposes them towards academic success. While this has much to do with the current ways by which academic success is being assessed and measured, it also has to do with what teachers and hence students focus on in class.

Many teachers and students in schools tend to pay greater attention to writing than speaking, with many believing that writing is a skill that needs to be taught and honed in a systematic way unlike speaking which does not. It is little wonder therefore that by the time students enter tertiary education, their standard of speaking skills is often lower than desired, with many lacking the ability to engage in spontaneous, sustained, substantive and critical talk in class (Graff, 2003). While many tertiary institutions do help students to make the necessary transition to higher education by providing some form of academic writing support, a comparable level of support for effective speaking or communication is often absent.

The aim of this paper is therefore to urge educators in tertiary institutions to pay greater

attention to the development of effective oral communication skills in their students. Framed against both global imperatives and local conditions, it argues that speaking is an area that demands our attention. By drawing on the findings of a research project on "dialogic teaching" (Alexander, 2001) at the pre-university level, it offers some directions for teachers to expand the discursive space for students to engage in critical and constructive talk in the classroom, which would hopefully pave the way for them to be more effective and confident communicators in the workplace and beyond.

SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

In the discourse on 21st century competencies, communication skills are often highlighted as one of the key competencies that would enable people to effectively function in the global landscape of the 21st century (Partnership for 21st century skills, 2011). As the global landscape becomes increasingly marked by the proliferation of information and communication technologies and the increased mobility of peoples, cultures and ideas across geographic boundaries, the ability to communicate effectively across these social, cultural and cyber spaces also becomes imperative for people of the 21st century to live, work and function effectively (Wan and Gut, 2011).

Effective communication entails the ability to communicate our ideas and viewpoints to other people in a way that promotes understanding. As such, having effective communication skills means going beyond mastering the mechanics of speaking to include the dynamics of interaction which relates to what scholars call "interactional competence" (Kramsch, 1986). This refers to the ability to interact in various communicative situations and embraces the linguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competencies that a person needs to bring to bear in co-constructing knowledge with others. In the classroom context, this would include the ability to articulate one's thoughts and viewpoints clearly and coherently, pose (and respond to) meaningful questions, as well as offer alternatives and challenge viewpoints or opinions in an appropriate manner. While many tertiary institutions offer courses that seek to hone students' public speaking or presentation skills, few if any at all focus on the more interactive aspects of speaking. As experienced educators, we know that the ability to ask the right questions at the right time and to respond critically yet constructively to students' responses have a considerable bearing on increasing the students' level of engagement, motivation and hence learning. What we may be less conscious of is the role we play as good models for students to ask intelligent questions, to articulate their own opinions in a clear, coherent and confident manner, and to respond critically yet constructively to divergent viewpoints, whether they are proffered by their peers or their teacher. Besides imparting knowledge and skills, we are also, consciously or sub-consciously, apprenticing our students into the habits of speaking and thinking in ways that are sanctioned and valued within our disciplines.

This relates to the growing interest in what is known as "disciplinary literacy" (Shanahan

and Shanahan, 2008) which stems from the belief that, in addition to generic literacy skills like reading and writing, there are discipline-specific competencies which focus on ways of thinking about and practising a particular discipline, like Science, Mathematics, History or Philosophy. Being literate in a discipline means not only knowing the content associated with the discipline but also what Fang and Coatoam (2013) call the "disciplinary habits of mind, (i.e. ways of reading, writing, viewing, speaking, thinking, reasoning, and critiquing)" (p. 628). These "habits of mind" are very often encoded in and expressed through language, including ways of speaking. Very little attention has thus far been devoted to speaking in a discipline-appropriate manner, which is perhaps the reason why employers continue to lament that graduates who enter their profession lack the requisite communication skills. For instance, Gray (2010) cites international research findings such as Albrecht & Sack (2000) and McDonald (2007) that point to the need for accounting graduates to be equipped with stronger communication skills, particularly in the area of speaking. In her study, she found that over 90 percent of respondent accountancy professionals reported oral communication skills to be either essential or very important in a new graduate (p. 51). Among some of the oral skills most highly valued by professionals are: asking for clarification or feedback from management and conveying an attitude of respect and interest in clients. Interestingly, among the least highly valued skill is giving presentations using visuals, such as PowerPoint (p. 49).

Focusing on the dynamics of interaction in our classrooms therefore fills an important gap in the way tertiary students are being equipped and enabled to participate more fully in and engage more meaningfully with their own knowledge construction and learning both at the academic and professional settings.

Quite apart from the impetus provided by globalization to prepare graduates for the 21st century workplace, there is also a strong signal from the government here in Singapore to raise the general standard of speaking skills among Singaporeans. The Speak Good English Movement (or SGEM) first mounted in 2000 was a response to the perceived decline in the standard of spoken English in Singapore and how this would blunt our competitive edge in the global arena. Since its launch, the SGEM has been an annual fixture not only in the government's calendar of campaign events but has also cascaded into many schools which organise special programmes or activities to foster the use of "good" English among their students. The idea of speaking "correct" English has even spawned a television game show called "Say the Word" in which contestants win points for their ability to pronounce words according to Standard British English pronunciation. Again, it is apparent that these local efforts to promote "good" speaking skills are targeted primarily or even exclusively at the mechanics of speaking accurately or more generally using a "standard" variety of English. Little or no attention has been paid to the need to cultivate effective communication in general which extends beyond accuracy or fluency. It is only recently that the Ministry of Education announced a whole school approach to effective communication to "build strong communication skills among our young, so as to prepare them well for the future" (MOE, 2010). This approach, which draws on some of the principles of "disciplinary literacy", embraces

a broadened scope of effective communication skills that include speaking clearly in class and even teachers' questioning techniques.

At both the global and local levels, therefore, there appears to be a recognition of the need for teachers and students to focus not only on speaking accurately or fluently but on the broader competency of effective communication, which embraces our ability to interact and engage with others in a constructive and meaningful way.

What I discuss in the rest of this paper is a study which looks at the verbal interactions between teachers and students at the pre-university level in Singapore and some pertinent findings. The purpose of the discussion is to offer some directions for educators in tertiary institutions (and not only those who work directly in the field of communication or literacy education) to focus on developing the oral communication skills of their students, with a focus on the dynamics of interaction. This would hopefully cultivate not only more responsive and articulate students in class but ultimately more engaged, effective and confident communicators for the 21st century.

STUDY ON CLASSROOM TALK

The study in question is entitled "Exploring the dialogic space in teaching: A study of pre-university classroom talk in Singapore". It is a qualitative baseline study focused on the classroom talk between teachers and their students in the subject, General Paper (GP), which is taken by almost all pre-university students in Singapore. The choice of GP is premised on its explicitly stated aims which converge on the development of cognitive and communication skills to enable students "to think critically, to construct cogent arguments and to communicate their ideas using clear, accurate and effective language" (General Paper Syllabus, 2014:1).

By closely examining transcripts of 36 GP lessons collected from 18 teachers in 7 Junior Colleges and Integrated Programme (IP) schools, the aim of the study was to find out the extent to which GP teachers are able to create a discursive space in the classroom for students to actively participate in the co-construction of knowledge, thereby allowing them to take active ownership of their learning. In short, it is an approach that has been called "dialogic" (Alexander, 2001; Burbules, 1993; Wells, 1999), one that draws on dialogue, with its emphasis on bi-directionality, interactivity and, most crucially, egalitarianism, as a tool for learning.

In this study, "dialogic teaching" (as opposed to monologic teaching) refers not simply to engaging students in dialogue, but opening the space for students to challenge their peers, teachers or textbooks, so that there is a greater negotiation and co-construction of knowledge rather than knowledge being unilaterally transmitted from the teacher to the student (Alexander, 2008). For this to happen, the traditional hierarchical structures that define teacher-student roles and dictate teacher-student relationships would need

to be dismantled to make way for a more egalitarian structure, not only as a means to produce better learning and greater academic success but as an end in itself. In the words of Burbules (1993), "we engage in dialogical approaches not because they are methods guaranteed to succeed, but fundamentally because we are drawn to the spirit of equality, mutuality, and cooperation that animates them" (p. 143).

Using a coding scheme that probes into the ways GP teachers who took part in the study initiated discussion and responded to what students said, the study found that the teachers tended to enact a monologic and transmissive mode of interaction with their students. For instance, they tended to use "Display" or closed-ended questions as opposed to more "Exploratory" or open-ended questions (the terms "Display" and "Exploratory" questions were first used by Cazden, 2001). "Display" questions test prior knowledge whereas "Exploratory" questions invite students to explore an issue more deeply or offer alternative viewpoints. The study found that a large proportion of teacher questions sought to test students' existing knowledge and understanding rather than to develop new or alternative perspectives, interpretations and understandings. Even in a subject that purportedly seeks to develop students' critical thinking and communication skills, there appeared to be a heavy reliance on 'feeding' students with information, such as facts, figures, examples and ideas or arguments gleaned from prescribed readings, deemed essential for students to perform well in high-stakes tests and examinations. We see this monologic, transmissive mode of teaching being enacted in Excerpt 1 below, which is taken from a lesson on crime and punishment. The lesson began with the teacher getting the students to focus on the essay question, "Is it ever acceptable to break the law?" assigned to them in the previous lesson. The excerpt begins when her students seem unable to generate ideas to respond to the question and she decides to help them.

Excerpt 1

Teacher	Okay, it is an agreed social code, okay, or conduct or behaviour. Okay. It is an agreed code of social oh uh like conduct and behaviour, right? To influence uh the masses or the citizens in a country. Okay. So we <u>should</u> [my emphasis] all aspire towards this. So the laws exist, so that we <u>must</u> [my emphasis] all be like that. Okay, so with that in mind, right, now understanding what law exists for, you switch them around, and tell me why it is unacceptable to break them? Okay. So it is that easy. Okay, so SV1 has to do with how, okay, firstly okay, since laws exist to maintain order. Okay in societies. Okay fill in the sentence for me. Breaking them will therefore lead to what? Gary? Breaking them will therefore?
Student	Create disorder.
Teacher	Create disorder and chaos. Okay? And chaos.

Alright?
So anything you say about how laws cannot be broken.
Okay cannot be broken, so as to maintain..? (3) uh, another word for "order"?
What are we trying to maintain?
We are actually trying to maintain normalcy.
Normalcy means normal, normality, not normality, I mean just normal life.
Okay, life.
Peace and order lah.

In Excerpt 1 above, we see the teacher emphasising the importance of having a code of conduct in a society as a supporting view (SV1) to respond to the essay question. What is noteworthy here is the teacher's choice of words like "***we should***" and "***we must all***", which creates a sense of fixity or incontestability of the viewpoint and, more broadly, the knowledge that is being presented here. What is even more significant is the way in which the teacher frames her question: "***Okay fill in the sentence for me. Breaking them will therefore lead to what? Gary? Breaking them will therefore?***" We see this again a few lines later: "***Okay cannot be broken, so as to maintain..? uh, another word for "order"?***" Such a mode of questioning tends to elicit short, unelaborated answers, as it suggests that just one or two words are needed to fill in the blanks and complete the sentence. Moreover, it signals to the students that the teacher has a fixed answer in mind and, unless they are certain of the 'correct' answer, they would probably not volunteer to answer the teacher's question. The effect of this mode of questioning, especially if used repeatedly, is the suppression of dialogue, leaving the teacher having to answer her own questions, as we see in the excerpt: "***What are we trying to maintain? We are actually trying to maintain normalcy.***" These 'fill-in-the-blanks' questions are an example of "Display" questions which elicit what appear to students as fixed, predetermined answers that the teacher is looking for, thereby constricting the space for dialogue, personal reflection and opinion and suppressing critical thinking.

In Excerpt 2 below taken from the same lesson, we see further evidence of this suppression of student talk and, more crucially, critical thinking. The teacher begins by asking an open-ended question that could potentially open up the dialogic space -- "***What do you think?***" -- as a follow-up to a student's answer to the question, "***What kind of examples do you give?***" However, before the student has a chance to respond, the teacher, as if in anticipation of the student's inability to respond, decides to reformulate the question into a much more narrowly focused: "***Do you give uh examples of laws or crimes?***" When the student seems unable to respond, the teacher repeats the question and decides to answer the question herself without waiting for the student's response. Instead of helping students to engage with and contribute to the discussion, the teacher's over eager intervention is likely to have the effect of disengaging students by shutting them out of the discussion. It also signals to students that she is not really interested in what they think despite asking them, but has a ready answer of her own. What appears as an "Exploratory" question ("***What do you think?***") may thus be interpreted as a "Display" question.

Excerpt 2

Teacher	Uhm, so now the examples are important. What kind of examples do you give?
Student	Maybe laws that already broken are not (…)
Teacher	What do you think? Do you give uh examples of laws or crimes?
Student	Hmm….
Teacher	Do you give examples of both? Laws and crime? Okay, laws that are there and laws that are broken and therefore lead to either normalcy or the lack of normalcy because of the lack of, because of people not abiding by the laws.

Apart from the reliance on "Display" questions, the study also found that the teachers who participated in the study tended to discourage rather than encourage student contributions through the ways they responded to what their students asked or said in class. For instance, instead of encouraging students to clarify, elaborate on or justify their viewpoints, teachers seemed to prematurely evaluate student contributions, thereby foreclosing the discussion. Even students' valiant attempts to engage with the discussion are sometimes thwarted if the teacher is too hasty in evaluating or dismissing their contribution, giving them the impression that their contributions are erroneous, irrelevant or otherwise of little value. We see an example of this at play in Excerpt 3 below when the teacher asks the question -- "***Why do red lights and green lights, what do they do?***" – to which a student's answer -- "***To protect pedestrians***" – is immediately dismissed: "***No, no. They maintain order, right.***" Without asking the student to explain his answer or explaining why it is not acceptable and providing her own answer instead, the teacher sends a message to the student and the rest of the class that she had a fixed answer in mind to advance her argument that laws exist in order to maintain social order. This would leave the student wondering why his answer, which probably seemed perfectly sensible and plausible to him, was deemed wrong or unacceptable which would, in turn, discourage him from further attempts to participate in the classroom talk which then inevitably descends into a monologue. We see the same pattern repeated a little later when a student's contribution (largely inaudible to the researcher) was unceremoniously rejected as the teacher launched into a monologue providing her own example of Somalia. In so doing, the teacher probably thought that she was helping her students to answer the essay question under discussion without realising that she was effectively cutting her students off from the discussion and thereby depriving them of the opportunity to participate in the valuable process of knowledge co-construction. It was observed in this and numerous other instances that once the teacher provided an evaluation on what the students had said it was very unlikely that a student would reopen the dialogue with a counter-point or even a query.

Excerpt 3

Teacher	Okay, so you can begin with the easiest. You can talk about traffic laws. Why do traffic laws exist? Why do red lights and green lights, what do they do?
Student	To protect pedestrians.

Teacher	No, no. They maintain order, right. So I know when to go and when to stop and mine won't collide into your car. It's just you know, order. …… [several turns omitted] Alright, traffic laws, uh, okay, so moving on. We can actually think of more examples for this later. Okay. Uh sorry?
Student	They (…) that some law (…)
Teacher	No. Uh, here, okay, a counter example, or a more serious example that I can give, I can also talk about Somalia. Okay why Somalia? Somalia is considered as the world's most chaotic or anarchic state. Okay they are in a stage of anarchy, meaning chaos. Why? Because the government of the country is only in control of the capital right now. Okay and the various parts of Somalia are actually controlled by other warlords. This has been going on for the last two, two decades or so....

The study also provided evidence that oftentimes, teachers merely acknowledged students' contributions with "***ok***", "***yes***", or "***ah huh***" without any explicit evaluation. This was frequently followed by the teacher's extended explanation or protracted elaboration of his or her own viewpoint which seemed to diminish, supersede or even erase what the students had offered, not dissimilar from what we have just seen in Excerpt 3. Seldom did the teachers probe for the basis of what students said or extend the dialogue by inviting other students in the class to comment on their peers' contributions. All this has the effect of constricting the discursive space for students to contribute spontaneously or substantively to class discussions, as they wait nervously to be called upon by their teacher to give an answer which might be deemed inadequate, irrelevant or downright fallacious. It also devalues student contributions with respect to what the teacher has to offer, thereby reinforcing an epistemological structure that is heavily centred on the teacher as the main if not sole proprietor of knowledge.

Although the study is still ongoing at the time of writing this paper and the findings hereby reported are necessarily preliminary and tentative, the findings are nonetheless interesting and offer some food for thought for students and educators at the tertiary level. Seen as the crucial, preparatory stage for university education, pre-university education constitutes a vital link to the academic literacies that students at the university level are expected to possess and display. While there has been much work on academic literacies that suggest that undergraduates are not adequately prepared to cope with the rigours of university studies, particularly academic writing (see for instance Paltridge, 2004 for a review), there has been relatively little work on the stage of education that is meant to prepare students for such demands when they enter university. By examining what takes place in the teaching and learning of a subject that is aimed expressly at cultivating critical thinking and effective communication skills to

help students formulate and articulate arguments and opinions, this study has produced findings that have important implications not only on the teaching of a key subject in Singapore's junior college curriculum but also in higher education in general as lecturers contemplate the gaps they and their students need to negotiate as they transit from pre-university to university education.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

One direct implication of the study is for classroom teachers or lecturers to be more conscious of their questioning approach. Specifically, they can ask themselves how much of the questioning is directed at getting students to demonstrate or display pre-existing or predetermined knowledge and how much of it is aimed at probing for reflection, evaluation and thereby a deepened understanding of a concept or issue. Findings from the study show that more than half of the questions asked by GP teachers were "Display" in nature whereas about a third of them were "Exploratory". What would our own questioning stance be like? How often and, crucially, how successfully do we ask "Exploratory" questions that encourage students to offer (alternative) viewpoints? Perhaps what is more significant are findings related to the ways in which GP teachers responded to what students said in class. Findings show that a vast majority of the time, GP teachers merely responded with verbal signals that indicate that they heard or acknowledged what their students had said. Less than a fifth of their responses had to do with evaluating what students said or getting students to clarify their answers. Most significantly, a very small proportion of their responses probed for students' justifications for or reasons behind what they said or for alternative perspectives or interpretations.

Such findings beg the question of how tertiary level educators compare with GP teachers at the pre-university level. How do we tend to respond to what students say in our class? Do we merely acknowledge what they say in a perfunctory manner? Or do we encourage them to elaborate, clarify and justify their views and standpoints? How often do we invite other students to comment on and evaluate their peers' responses, as much as some of our students may cower and cringe when our questioning gaze falls on them? To what extent do we delay our own evaluations and offer of 'preferred answers' as much as our students seem to covet or even insist on them?

The way we initiate student response and the way we respond to what students say is manifestly critical in shaping the discursive space for dialogic or monologic interactions between our students and us. Our students' reticence or seeming diffidence may not be due to their (inferior) cognitive abilities or personality predispositions, as teachers sometimes assume, but the classroom culture and the interactive structures that have been established and entrenched over time.

Therefore, focusing on the dynamics of interaction in our class to see how we can engender a classroom culture that enables and encourages our students to participate and contribute to substantive and dialogic exchanges may be one way to develop more confident, articulate and effective communicators in our students. In the process, we are in fact apprenticing them to the disciplinary habits of thinking, writing, speaking and doing.

Literacy scholars and educators have long argued for a sociocultural view of knowledge construction, in which learning is seen as necessarily building upon and arising from a collaborative practice in which teacher and students equally participate in and contribute to a dialogic meaning-making process (Mercer and Howe, 2012). Some have even voiced the need to develop a set of "collaborative literacies" among students, the goal of which is to produce a joint composition or interpretation of a text (Kiili, Laurinen, Marttunen, & Leu, 2012), whether this be a written, spoken or digital text. Such collaborative practices can arguably pave the way for nurturing a sense of active citizenry in our students, which has been recognised as an important role of education both locally and in other parts of the world (see The Straits Times, 2011 and Face It Project, 2007). In this respect, the role of classroom talk and specifically dialogic talk has been linked to the cultivation of active citizenry:

> The quality of dialogue and discourse is central to learning in citizenship education. Dialogue and discourse are connected with learning about shared values, human rights and issues of justice and equality. (Deakin et al., 2005, cited in Lyle, 2008, p. 233)

Hence, developing a more dialogic discursive space in our classrooms by focusing on classroom talk can reap benefits that go well beyond producing a lively exchange of ideas between our students and us to the cultivation of a cognitive attitude and epistemological stance that empowers our students to become more active learners as well as active citizens.

CONCLUSION

In a culture where the traditional hierarchical structures that define teacher-student roles and dictate teacher-student relationships are deeply entrenched, one of the challenges that tertiary educators face is to dismantle these structures so that students become more able and willing to actively participate in the cut-and-thrust of dialogue, discussion and debate rather than remain as passive bystanders. No longer are we perceived as the sage on a stage, nor should we be content to be a guide by the side; rather, we should envisage ourselves as being a meddler in the middle (McWilliam, 2009). And one way by which we can

effectively provoke our students to participate in and contribute to the thick of our tutorial discussions is to create a safe environment in which students feel that they can make a silly remark or ask a silly question without suffering the fear of ridicule or ignominy of contempt. Sincere praise and encouragement can go a long way towards cultivating a willingness in our students to take risks. Finally, our own skeptical and questioning stance towards established or authoritative knowledge serves perhaps as the most powerful endorsement of the same critical stance that we wish for our students to adopt.

At the end of the day, the pedagogical approach and interactive pattern one adopts necessarily reflect one's assumptions about the primary role played by a teacher vis-à-vis students, whether for instance the role is to impart knowledge or to facilitate knowledge (co-)construction. More fundamentally, it has to do with one's epistemological convictions of whether knowledge is fixed, static and resides in books or whether it is fluid, dynamic and resides in the hitherto unexplored recesses and untapped imaginations of the human mind.

REFERENCES

Alexander, R.J. (2001). *Culture and Pedagogy*. London: Blackwell.

Alexander, R.J. (2008). *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. (4th ed.). York: Dialogos.

Albrecht, W. S., & Sack, R. J. (2000). Acc*ounting education: Charting the course through a perilous future*. Sarasota, FL: American Accounting Association.

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana.

Burbules, N. (1993). *Dialogue in teaching: Theory and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. (2nd ed.). New York: Heinneman.

Deakin, R., Crick, R., Taylor, M., Ritchie, S., Samuel, E. and Durant, K. (2005). A *Systematic Review of The Impact of Citizenship Education on Student Learning and Achievement*. London: EPPI-Centre.

Face It Project. (2007). *Active Citizenship* [Webpage]. Retrieved 19 October 2014, from http://www.faceitproject.org/active_citizenship.htm.

Fang, Z. & Coatoam, S. (2013). Disciplinary literacy: What you want to know about it. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 56 (8), 627-632.

General Paper Syllabus. (2014). [webpage] Retrieved on 19 October 2014 from http://www.seab.gov.sg/aLevel/2014Syllabus/8807_2014.pdf

Graff, G. (2003). *Clueless in academe: How schooling obscures the life of the mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gray, E. (2010). Specific oral communication skills desired in new accountancy graduates. *Business Communication Quarterly*. 73 (1), 40-67.

Kiili, C., Laurinen, L., Marttunen, M., & Leu, D.J. (2012). Working on understanding during collaborative online reading. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 44(4), 448–483.

Kramsch, C. (1986). From language proficiency to interactional competence. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70, 366-372.

Lyle, S. (2008). Dialogic teaching: Discussing theoretical contexts and reviewing evidence from classroom practice. *Language and Education*, 22(3), 222-240.

McDonald, P. (2007). Preparing tomorrow's workforce. *Financial Executive*, p. 52-55.

McWilliam, E. (2009). Teaching for creativity: from sage to guide to meddler. A*sia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29 (3), 281-293.

Mercer, N., & Howe, C. (2012). Explaining the dialogic processes of teaching and learning: The value and potential of sociocultural theory. L*anguage, Culture and Social Interaction*, 1, 12–21.

Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2010, March 10). *Strengthening language skills to prepare our students well for the future* [Press release]. Retrieved 3 February 2014, from http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2010/03/strengthening-language-skills-.php.

Partnership for 21st century skills. (2011). *Framework for 21st Century Learning*. Retrieved 15 January 2014, from http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=119.

Paltridge, B. (2004). Academic writing. *Language Teaching*, 37(2), 87-105.

Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2008). Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(1), 40–61.

The Straits Times. (2011). *Planting the seeds of values*. November 10,2011, A7

Wan, G.F and Gut, D. M (Eds). (2011). *Bringing schools into the 21st century.* New York: Springer.

Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.