Chapter 2.2
Teaching and Learning English in Brunei Darussalam

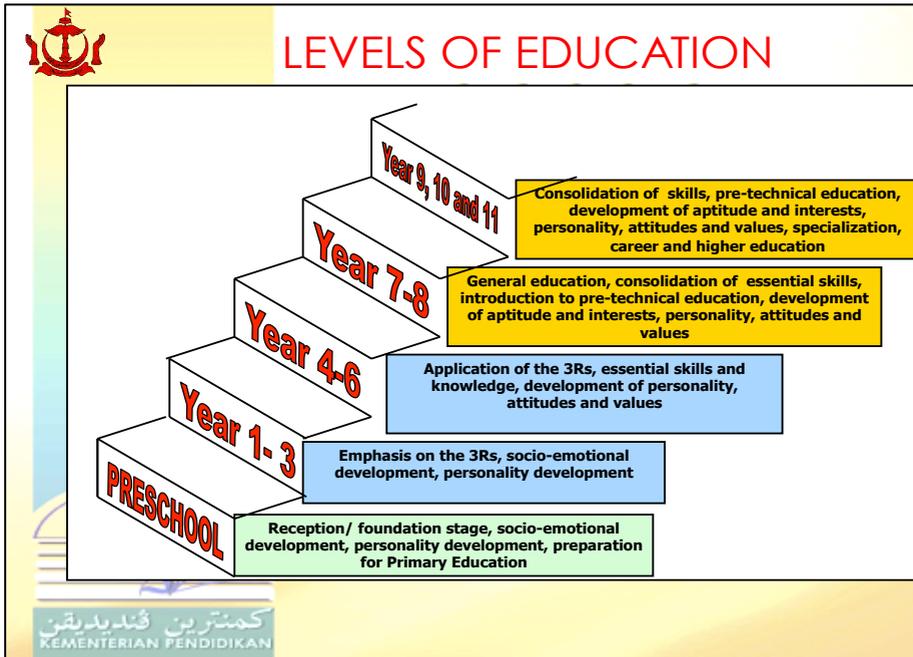## Saratha Sithamparam and Jainatul Halida binti Hj Jaidin

Introduction

Brunei Darussalam through the Ministry of Education is committed to providing quality education to all students across the nation. As part of the government's effort to improve the quality of educational services in Brunei, the Ministry of Education has implemented various initiatives including the introduction of a new education system "designed to provide learners with broad, balanced, relevant, and differentiated learning experiences" (Curriculum Development Department 2009, 1). An important part of this new education system is the emphasis on students learning subjects in both the Malay and English languages (with Malay and English as subjects in the curriculum). The bilingual education policy introduced in 1984 ensures students attain a high degree of proficiency in both languages, Malay being the national language and English the international language. In this paper, the ways in which English is learnt as a subject are explored and illustrated in the form of three case studies involving a preschooler, a primary school student, and a group of lower secondary learners of English. In order to provide a platform for understanding these case studies, a brief presentation on the Brunei education system and developments in English language education will now be discussed.

The Brunei Education System and Developments in English Language Education

In 2008, a new education system, *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke 21* (SPN21), or in English, the National Education System for the Twenty-first Century was introduced in Brunei Darussalam. The SPN21 curriculum places the learner at the heart of teaching and learning based on an appreciation of the students' individual needs. In the new curriculum, the Ministry of Education (2008, 9) explicitly states that "the overarching aim is for students to be life-long learners who are confident and creative, connected, and actively involved in the quest for knowledge."

Figure 2.2-1 illustrates the levels of education under the SPN21. Each level is accompanied by a set of curricular goals that are used to measure students' academic progress. Notably, the education system places strong emphasis on

literacy, numeracy, science, physical education, as well as civics and moral

LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Year 9, 10 and 11 — Consolidation of skills, pre-technical education, development of aptitude and interests, personality, attitudes and values, specialization, career and higher education

Year 7-8 — General education, consolidation of essential skills, introduction to pre-technical education, development of aptitude and interests, personality, attitudes and values

Year 4-6 — Application of the 3Rs, essential skills and knowledge, development of personality, attitudes and values

Year 1- 3 — Emphasis on the 3Rs, socio-emotional development, personality development

PRESCHOOL — Reception/ foundation stage, socio-emotional development, personality development, preparation for Primary Education

KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN

education.
Figure 2.2-1: Levels of education and curriculum goals (Curriculum Development Department, Ministry of Education 2009, 9).

The country's bilingual policy enables students to acquire the national language, Malay, and English. Proficiency in the latter enables the learner to communicate effectively and access a greater mass of information in this globalized world (Ministry of Education 2008). In the context of Brunei Darussalam, the goals for teaching language therefore, are two-fold:

1. To enable learners to communicate in two languages (bilingualism).
2. To enable learners to read, view, and produce texts in two languages (biliteracy).

National policy decisions and various initiatives by the Ministry of Education over the years have charted the course for the teaching of English in Brunei Darussalam. While policies have set broad directions, there have been a number of specific initiatives by the Ministry of Education in relation to each of the subject areas in the curriculum. These educational initiatives have sought to support the professional practice of teachers through "the provision of guidelines and frameworks for teaching and learning, the development of resources that teachers can use in the design and implementation of lessons, and professional development to enhance and sustain the capacity of the profession for effective teaching of the subjects in the national curriculum" (Sithamparam, Tan, and Raju 2014, 15).

In addition to the development of resources including textbooks for the Brunei context, programs such as the Reading and Language Acquisition project (RELA) introduced in 1989, the joint MOE-CfBT English Project for Preschools (EPPS) piloted in 2005, The Integrated Approach to Reading Acquisition (TIARA) for preschool and primary education (2009), and the Preschool English Program for government preschools (2010) have been major initiatives aimed at improving the teaching and learning of English in Bruneian schools. In addition, developments in assessment as well as the introduction of co-curricular programs support these initiatives.

Key Aspects of the English Language Curriculum

In an era of globalization and a developing techno-digitized society, the Ministry of Education is cognizant that learners need to be proficient in English not only to communicate effectively, but also to be able to use the language to acquire knowledge, to think deeply and to solve problems, as well as to extend their knowledge and experience of the cultures of other people (Curriculum Development Department 2009). In order to enable learners to prepare for the changing socio-economic demands and the skills needed for the twenty-first century as a result of advances in information technology, the provision of opportunities for personal and intellectual development, as well as the pursuit of further studies, pleasure, and work in the English medium are necessary (Curriculum Development Department 2009).

Towards these ends the English Language curriculum focuses on the development of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Fluency and accuracy in language use are targeted through appropriate mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and the mechanics of language use. In addition, the inculcation of a love for reading and the enhancement of critical and creative skills through an active use of the language are encouraged (Curriculum Development Department 2009).

The preschool years are the beginning of the foundation stage in English Language development, which extends across the lower primary years. An active use of language skills, effective communication, and an increasing mastery of the language are highlighted across upper primary and secondary education. It is therefore most important to start with the child. Indeed, an insight into children's learning experiences as seen through their perspectives may improve our understanding of what aspects of learning are important to them (Jaidin 2009). This learner-centeredness in English language education is illustrated in the following case studies in literacy learning across three levels of education in Brunei Darussalam.

Case Studies in Literacy Learning

The student-centeredness as articulated in the national curriculum is advocated in both formal and non-formal learning spaces. This resonates well with a pedagogy of English Language teaching that allows students to develop ownership in literacy learning activities such as by allowing them choices in writing tasks, in deciding on the genres they produce, and through the use of modalities that best express meaning as they begin to journey towards developing increasing proficiency in English.

Central to language learning is the developing ability to produce and communicate meaning. As students figure out ways of putting across their thoughts and ideas, they compose. As they unlock the words in a text to figure out what is meant, they comprehend. The three vignettes presented below offer insights into how students communicate meaning by drawing on the resources that they have to create texts in English. The perspective on literacy informing this discussion extends beyond conventional notions of reading and writing to include talking and listening as well as visual literacies such as drawing (Makin and Diaz 2002). The episodes involving the composing process in English involve student-writers from different levels of education in Brunei Darussalam. They emerged when students were provided with opportunities to engage in English literacy activities in ways that were personally meaningful to them.

Pedagogical Moment 1: Composing in Preschool

Diaz and Makin (2002, 8) write that preschoolers are "capable of understanding that meanings are represented in texts and are able to think critically [and creatively] about how these meanings influence their own thinking about the world and relationships with people." This orientation formed the underpinnings of a study by Sithamparam and Liew (2010) on English language teaching and learning in a government-run urban preschool in Brunei Darussalam. Here, the teacher drew on the curriculum to develop a series of listening and speaking lessons on themes from the world of childhood familiar to her preschoolers: "Myself," "My Family," and "My House." At the children's request, drawing was introduced and the teacher affirmed their budding talents through colorful displays of children's drawings and craftwork on the walls of her classroom.

As part of the research, the teacher engaged individual children in conversations to talk about the drawings they produced to probe their meaning-making and encourage their use of English. While the initial intent was for the child-created drawings to serve as a point of focus in the children's talk, the communication developed so that the drawings became springboards for more imaginative acts of language use as the children began to engage in oral composition drawing on both their in-class lessons and out-of-class experiences to embellish the visual representations in their artwork. What emerged is best illustrated through the case of five-year-old Farid (all persons are referred to through the use of pseudonyms). The data cited is from Sithamparam and Liew

(2010). At the time of the study, Farid, whose home language was Malay, was only into his fourth month in preschool.

In his drawing entitled "Myself" he drew and colored a figure of a boy standing by a bicycle with his hands outstretched and his eyes colored red. Below is an excerpt of the conversation between Farid and his teacher:

Farid: I make it.
Teacher: You made it. Who is this?
Farid: Me.
Teacher: It's you. Wow! And who is this? Who?
Farid: Me.
Teacher: You. Wow. It's you. Look. And this one, what is this?
Farid: Umm . . . a bi-cy-cle. Uh . . . that is my shirt is black. And I play. But . . . but I waiting my friend (raising his voice). He's not come (voice drops sadly).
Teacher: Oh you were waiting for your friend and he did not come.
Farid: Yes. And then I mad.
Teacher: You were mad because your friend did not come?
Farid: No.
Teacher: Oh. Look at your eyes. Your eyes are red! Why? . . . (silence) . . . It shows that you are mad?
Farid: Yes.
Teacher: Oh. What were you going to do with your friend?
Farid: Just play.
Teacher: Play what?
Farid: Uh . . . play hide and seek!
Teacher: What about the bicycle?
Farid: Uh . . . The bicycle is outside. I put outside. Uh . . . I just sitting in the bicycle.
Teacher: Umm, you are standing near to the bicycle.
Farid: Nooo (insistently). I just sit on the bicycle.

The child was able to talk about his work in English using meaningful phrases and appropriate words. After establishing that it was his drawing ("I make it"), he affirms that he is the subject of the drawing. In response to his teacher's question he names the bicycle and states that his shirt is black. Interestingly, while the expectation was that the children would name and describe items in their drawings, what developed was the composition of an oral story as Farid narrated that he had been waiting for a friend who did not show up. He then offers that he became angry saying "And then I mad." He was able to communicate that he would have played "hide-and-seek" with his friend, but instead had been left sitting on his bicycle. The researchers noted that the child was able to construct a narrative on his own describing both an action and a relationship with a person not in the visual ("I waiting my friend") while expressing an appropriate emotion using the right words in English.

What was interesting was how he interwove observations about what he had drawn taking it beyond the naming activities common in classrooms: "have no

color . . . my ears . . . Ooopsie! My tongue." As he went on to name the parts of his body in his drawing: ears, eyes, tongue, tummy, arms, he began to count. In a leap of imagination, the child then made connections with a TV program he had watched on cable: "one, two . . . Like more. Like four arms . . . Ben 10 . . . He's . . . He's . . . What is a . . . Have alien!" Words like "alien" were not on the prescribed wordlist of the curriculum, and while English was not used by his family, this ability to use the word suggested the power of resources such as the media in providing language input to children.

In talking to his teacher about the colorful drawing of his house that he had drawn in another piece of work, he used the words that his teacher had taught him from a lesson on parts of a house, which she had taught the class using a three-dimensional model. Pointing to his drawing the child said, "This is my door. And this is my roof. This is my window. This is my wall. And this is my . . . stairs!" And then racing on, he drew on yet another English lesson and began naming the colors he had used: "This is blue. This is pink. This is yellow. This is green. This is purple. This is orange." Slowing down, he wanted his teacher to notice that on the right hand corner of his work, he had written down the date as she had instructed:

Farid: You said . . . like . . . ah . . . this. This date.
Teacher: Why is it blue? Why is it green? Why is it yellow? And why is the door pink?
Farid: And that and that. The date. But YOU says . . . (emphatically).
Teacher: I said. I asked you to do that.
Farid: Yes. On this date.

After he had got his teacher to notice this, he went on "to compose" a story about his house. His house was in a kampong and it was where he lived with his mother and younger siblings.

Farid: Just . . . That is just my house at the kampong.
Teacher: Oh. Your house at the kampong. Who lives in this house?
Farid: This house?
Teacher: Yes, who lives in the house?
Farid: Me! And then my mum and my babies.
Teacher: You have a baby at home? How many?
Farid: Just one . . . boy . . . eh . . . girl!
Teacher: A girl. OK.
Farid: He's not big.
Teacher: She's still small. Your house . . . is it big or small?
Farid: Big . . . This is big.

Farid's use of English revealed an unexpected fluency from a child whose family only spoke to each other in Malay. He was able to use appropriate vocabulary to not only identify what was concrete and immediate in the visual representation he had produced but to also step beyond into composing stories relevant to the drawings.

Drawings and talk about children's texts in the second language preschool classroom therefore places meaning at the center of the language experience where images and words work together to support representation and meaning-making. Talk about their texts encourages children, as in the case of Farid, to actively draw on their experiences and reservoir of words and structures in English to communicate meaningfully, and this becomes evident when the teacher provides them the opportunity to do so. In the process, children's self-esteem is raised helping them develop confidence in using English to communicate.

Pedagogical Moment 2: Composing in Primary School

As with the case of Farid, data from Lamat and Sithamparam's (2010) study of Shireen, a seven-year-old primary school student indicated how the inclusion of drawing augmented more traditional communication using language. The primary school student from a government school in the capital was asked to maintain a writing journal as an out-of-class activity where she was free to write on any topic she chose on a regular basis. The Year 2 student spoke both Malay and English, did well in her studies and enjoyed drawing. Her ambition was to become an astronaut or a professor. Her self-portrait was a smiling, bright-eyed, bespectacled girl wearing a tudung. The cover of her journal was decorated with drawings of rockets and planets and her favorite cartoons. She also wrote down lines from her favorite songs and the titles of her favorite books evidencing the rich exposure to literacy that she engaged with. Her hobbies were watching television, swimming, reading and writing in her diary.

One of her early entries was a page entitled, "Welcome to my family . . ." Below a drawing of all of the members of her family the Year 2 student wrote:

> My father's name is . . . My mother's name is . . . I have two sisters and I have four brothers. I have one young brother. And I live in Jerudong. Every Friday I go to shopping. I love my Family.

Underneath the drawings of each of her siblings, she wrote their names. She added a caption next to her youngest brother, "He is so special. He has autism." And beneath a drawing of herself which was captioned "me" she drew a rocket. In Shireen's writing was a clear authorial voice. She was writing about content that was part of her childhood and communicating through a blend of image and word. In talking about her drawing of her family to the researcher, she took the researcher's pencil and outlined a roof over the heads of her family members and walls on the sides to offer her definition of family: "We live in one house. One family . . ."

Below is an excerpt from the interview session:

Shireen:	Err . . . you know roof?
Researcher:	Roof . . . you mean the roof of the house?
Shireen:	Yes! This one . . . (grabbing the pencil from the researcher's hand) *Ani* roof (drawing 3 lines). This one is

the house (drawing lines). We live in one house. One family. Err . . . I want you to know . . . I . . . love my family. This one (pointing) err . . . in school, my teacher always ask to color the topic.

She was emphatic when she told the researchers, "I love my family."

Like Farid, Shireen wanted the researchers to know that she had followed her teacher's instructions to color the topic. The researchers decided to observe her as she wrote an entry. She began by writing the day and date at the top of the page before drawing a face with a head of curly hair. She then inserted a speech bubble next to the face "Hello everyone!" Below it she wrote the caption, Michael Jackson. After this, she paused for a few minutes and then said aloud, "I want to be Michael Jackson."

She then proceeded to write the following sentences below this drawing:

If I were Michael Jackson, I would give my money to my friends. I would give my fantastic shirts to my uncles. But I don't want to be Michael Jackson. Because he is a guy and I am a girl. I want to be a professor.

Below this she went on to draw a picture of herself in a lecture theatre with a class of students seated before her. She labeled the drawing of herself, "This is me." The researchers noted the student's strong authorial voice and the ease with which she used words and visuals to put her message across.

While format was explicitly taught in English lessons, her incorporation of visuals, the use of speech and thought bubbles and ideas for her content came from experiences in the home and community. In addition to linguistic and cognitive elements, a pedagogy of English for young Bruneian ESL learners needs to be situated in the sociocultural worlds of childhood.

Pedagogical Moment 3: Composing in Lower Secondary

This episode shifts the lens to young adolescent learners of English in an all-girls school in Brunei. While visuals provided scaffolds for children's meaning-making in the earlier episodes, this vignette from a study by Zahari (2011) offers insights with regards to the role of peers in helping students learn English. The teacher-researcher conducted her study in the class she taught selecting six students as key participants: Erra, Ani, Eqah, Lily, Nurul, and Siti (not their real names). The students who ranged between 12 and 13 years of age were Year 8 students in a government secondary school at the time of the study. While two of the students spoke only Malay at home, four of them reported speaking some English with family members. Their grades indicated that their English language proficiency ranged from highly proficient to less proficient. Zahari's study was informed by Vygotskian conceptions of "the ZPD and the use of language between novice and more expert others" (Lee and Smagorinsky 2000, 5) including peers in learning how to compose a narrative fantasy story. Peer feedback would mediate the process of reworking drafts by student-writers so that there would be improvement in the

stories they wrote by way of content, text structure including the portrayal of narrative elements, and language use.

While picture compositions are sometimes used in lower secondary composition lessons, this pedagogical moment highlights learning to compose extended narratives without visual stimuli using a student-centered pedagogy of writing in a lower secondary English class. Students began to compose with their teacher guiding them using the process approach recommended in the curriculum. Students would learn to brainstorm, draft, as well as review and refine drafts to produce the final composition.

The use of peer feedback had recently been highlighted through the introduction of school-based assessment for learning introduced in April 2010 by the Ministry of Education. An important feature of the school-based assessment for learning in Brunei is to provide opportunities for students to evaluate their own learning and identify ways in which they could improve by obtaining feedback from teachers and peers (Rashid and Jaidin 2014). In Zahari's study, the students worked collaboratively in pairs to provide each other with feedback as they worked through the processes of drafting and revising to compose their stories.

Below is an excerpt taken from a peer feedback session:

Lily: The storyline is interesting. It's just I didn't understand some parts (indicating the need for clarity).

Eqah: Which one?

Lily: I didn't understand the beginning of the story.

Eqah: The first paragraph?

Lily: Yeah.

Eqah: Actually umm it's supposed to be longer but teacher said it was supposed to be 250 words right?

Lily: Yeah.

Eqah: So I started to try to cut some parts.

Lily: Umm I'm clear on who they are, but I think you should write what they look like (suggesting the need to develop content).

Eqah: What they look like?

Lily: Yeah . . . Like brown hair, blue eyes.

Eqah: Yeah. I was supposed to describe how they look like so that it is interesting but I remembered 250 words so I cut that part too.

In Lily's feedback to Eqah, she was offering the student-writer a reader's perspective. A story would be most effective if the reader could visualize the character, and so Lilly suggested that Eqah develop a physical description of the character in her story. Similarly, the other students in the class made suggestions such as the following with regards to character portrayal. Erra noted: "Characters. I'm clear who they are and I think the characters need more description . . . Sara and the dwarfs," while Ani asked, "Like Mike, how does he look like? His appearance and his mother?"

Other students offered their classmates feedback regarding other elements in the stories that they were writing. In providing feedback on plot development, one student told her classmate:

I think you can add more new ideas *lah* like to make it more interesting. And then I wish you would make the story more adventurous and add more interesting ideas. The fourth paragraph because he lay down at a random tree right? Ah . . . It would be nice if you added like he um did some exploring there . . . Like tried to find his parents . . . No way out, like that. And then the boy would have talked to his parents when he saw them again . . . Like just closure? Like why did he leave me, what did I do, like that.

Emotional intensity such as excitement and suspense were key ingredients in a successful plot if the story was to be compelling for the reader, and hence the feedback offered.

Reinforced by data from her study, Zahari (2011) draws from the scholarship on ESL writing and composing to highlight key elements in developing a pedagogy of English language teaching using peer feedback to teach writing. She reiterates that the use of peer feedback in English lessons:

- Provides students with opportunities to develop oral communication and writing skills;
- Encourages students to actively participate in their own learning so that they begin to take ownership of the process;
- Encourages students to become critical readers and revisers of their own writing as they learn to compose in English; and
- Enhances students' sense of audience, promotes collaborative learning, and fosters a sense of ownership of the texts that they produce.

Conclusion

The three case studies presented in this paper provide snapshots of how learning to compose in English are conducted at three levels of schooling, namely: preschool, primary, and lower secondary. The pedagogy of language teaching is driven and informed by the focus on the development of twenty-first century skills. The learner is placed at the heart of teaching and learning, drawing on their experiences (from both in and out of school) to construct knowledge about language using it to produce narratives and descriptions to communicate meaning. Being a bilingual and biliterate nation, a twenty-first century education system becomes an important driving force to provide students with the languages and literacy skills necessary for success in school, community, and life. In the case of Brunei, there is both a strong valuing of Malay as the national language, as well as the English language, which offers a key to access the world.

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