

## **What Works in the Classroom? Promoting Literacy Practices in English**

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### **Introduction**

Today, learners study and connect with one another across classrooms, community and country borders in new and exciting ways. The growth of global languages, specifically the worldwide spread of the English language in social, workplace and everyday communication demands radical transformation in the classroom.

The first part of the paper presents some key findings of English literacy practices. The discussion gives a rather disturbing picture that literacy is still learnt as a set of skills and not as a social practice connected to various domains and communities of practices in the real world. The second part of the paper unveils the recent shifts in thinking about literacy in general and specifically about learning in the English Language. The paper advances the Multiliteracies approach as propounded by the New London Group (1996) as a possible pathway of engaging the real world. This approach is supported by sample activities that motivate students to connect learning in real and meaningful ways.

### **Challenges Faced by Malaysian Teachers of English**

The Malaysian education scenario has seen numerous policies and approaches including Communicative Language Learning, New Primary Schools Curriculum (KBSR), Integrated Secondary School Curriculum, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Class readers and Literature in English Language Teaching and Creative and Thinking Skills to enhance English literacy practices.. Today, the buzz words in the world of literacy encompass the following: New Times, Digital Age, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Lifelong Learning and English. In this regard, the Education Ministry has emphasised the need to think about language and literacy practices in new ways as new communication technologies, globalised economies and world cultures are altering the ways we learn, work and live.

There are many grand visions and initiatives taken to enhance English literacy practices in Malaysia. It is important then to explore the current literacy practices in the school settings to map out some of the realities and challenges emerging in



the Malaysian learning contexts. The focus on students and educators and the activities that they take on is important as they are among of the key players in designing learning experiences.

A number of literacy research projects conducted by the author and co-researchers revealed that the actual implementations of the grand educational policies at the macro level were fraught with different difficulties as the realities operating at the schools were highly complicated and problematic. Some of the views of the Malaysian teachers on the difficulty of teaching English (Ambigapathy et al (2006); Ambigapathy, 2004; Ambigapathy, 2003; Ambigapathy; 2002a; Ambigapathy, 2002b) are highlighted below:

#### **i. Perceptions of English teachers**

Teachers find it difficult to motivate students to learn English. Teachers note that the primary and secondary school students who do not like English lessons are less proficient in English and seldom use English in or outside the classrooms. According to the teachers, the students prefer to use their own mother tongue (Bahasa Melayu, Chinese or Tamil) when they communicate with their friends, when working in their co-curricular activities, when in the canteen and when talking to teachers and administrative staff members. The students face difficulties in completing their exercises in English, and seldom approach their teachers when they face language difficulties in using English.

The main difficulties of teaching English include teaching methods, developing activities for listening and speaking, using grammar correctly and writing. In addition, the emphasis on tests and public examinations do not encourage effective learning in the English classroom.

#### **ii. Technological changes and patterns of literacy practices**

While many schools are pushing for more computer laboratories and IT based teaching learning materials in schools, only a few are using them effectively. Aspects that teachers want further help with are in communicative language teaching, computer based teaching, material development and classroom management. Many teachers are not confident using technology and are ill-equipped to handle students' special needs. The studies found that very few teachers are involved in curriculum development for English teaching. Many teachers are trapped in situations where "illiterates are teaching literates" especially in the use of ICT in the classroom.

Teachers generally agreed that they were more interested in interactive learning activities compared to traditional methods of learning. However, when asked if they would concentrate on more IT based learning methodologies rather than on traditional methods of learning (text book learning), a significant proportion of them were not sure if they would do so.



In addition, most of the teachers observed that many students do not own computers at home and that learners would use computers at cyber cafes. Sometimes the access to computer facilities posed great limitations to the range of activities that can be conducted with regard to ICT learning and applications.

### **iii. Workplace changes and patterns of literacy practices**

Changes in trade and industry have demanded changes in the new workplace. Productive economies require workplaces to change where there is a demand for collaboration, teamwork and multi-skilling. The abilities to solve problems, to select from a variety of resources and to use them appropriately are now crucial in the new workplace environments. Teachers attempt to use a variety of materials in their classes and problem-solving activities at all levels of education. However, field trips are not significant due to additional preparations and safety measures that need to be taken care to ensure a successful outing.

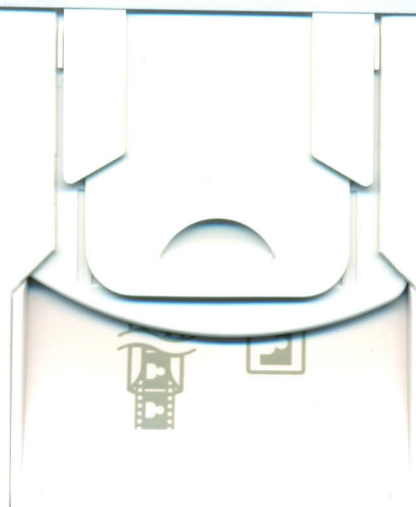
Changes in technology also impinge upon literacy and in this case the growing significance of hypertexts and other text modes means that students need to understand and be able to create knowledge in multi-modal forms. My research projects reveal that Newspaper in Education (NIE), drama, e-learning and multimedia language activities are less significant in language teaching in primary and secondary classrooms.

### **iv. Social changes and patterns of literacy practices.**

Considering that beyond teaching subjects spelled out in the curriculum teachers also transmit their knowledge and practice onto their students, it is important that we produce teachers who have excellent knowledge and practices. A large number of the teachers claimed that they always taught according to the prescribed syllabus and text books. Some of the topics discussed included social issues like drugs, environment, population growth, truancy and crime. But it appears that many of the teachers often talked more than their students in the classroom. Several of the teachers noted that they did not engage in-depth discussions that promoted critical awareness due to time and resource limitations.

### **v. Teacher commitment**

The views of teachers in many of the researcher's studies express the frustrations that English teachers have with the complexities of the official demand for higher standards, new assessments, integration of technology and interdisciplinary projects. Their teaching contexts involve rather big classes. Many teachers assert that they are overworked, stressed and are not motivated to engage in professional development. Most crucially, many job candidates for teaching indicate that teaching is a last resort due to the high levels of unemployment in Malaysia.



Learning to be teachers as caregivers means making a commitment to recognize important concepts that shape the learning experiences and to reflect on what students are thinking and doing in the classrooms. It is important for teachers to value the input of their students' experiences so that they can construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to the social and cultural realities in the present world.

It is recognized that there are many economic, social and infrastructural factors that need attention but the research findings on the teacher factor suggest that there are many challenges in the Malaysian English classrooms, and any initiatives for transformation will not occur unless teachers themselves feel the need for such a transformation.

### **Approaching the Real World - Thinking about Literacy in New Ways**

Communities of the world today are experiencing many changes. Socially, we are confronting societal changes that are shrinking the world and we can talk about cross-border understandings (Baynham, 1996). A smaller world allows individuals to be involved at a distance in events in other locations, mainly through television, email, mobile phone and the Internet. The advances of new technologies with their influence reaching into homes, schools, leisure sites and workplaces means that literacy can no longer be print-based but move towards the increasing use of still and moving images and sounds, specifically in the contemporary era (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001).

From the viewpoint of technology, reading can now entail hypertexts - viewing still and dynamic images, music, recognizing and interpreting colours, symbols and icons (Snyder, 2002). Globalisation and economic change have required workplaces to change where the emphasis falls on collaboration, teamwork and multi-skilling (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001). The ability to solve problems, to select from a variety of resources and to use them appropriately has become important dimensions in the new workplace environments (Baynham, 1996). In addition, social changes worldwide have highlighted the focus on identities. As teachers we need to recognize the diverse social, cultural and religious contexts of school communities and examine the sensitivities of these issues in a more productive way so that strong community links can be established (Lovat, 2003) and so that students learn routines that are not part of their social, cultural or religious contexts. We need to think about students' formal and informal learning experiences so that teaching can be made more meaningful in the real world.

The focus on teachers becomes critical as Malaysia is currently at the middle of its track towards attaining a developed nation status by 2020. As pointed out by the



Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, efforts to produce a developed and competitive race should start from an early stage as one's strength and resilience must be moulded from young, and this is where teachers come to the forefront in the implementation of various national education agendas that contribute to producing the best human capital (The Star, 17 May, 2006).

In this regard, there are some pertinent questions in three main areas that need to be confronted by teachers today:

### **Technological Change**

Are students using technologies and software at home that teachers have not used themselves? Are the technologies used in the classroom outdated? Do the technologies used in the classroom engage students in similar or different tasks and technologies to those available in their home and community life?

What are the real-life purposes for using these technologies? What social and literate skills and knowledge do students need to have to be able to use these school technologies in real life contexts?

### **Workplace Change**

How do class lessons emphasise problem-solving? Are students encouraged to think about the task at hand, the skills needed and the resources that are available to accomplish the task? How can literacy and reading tasks simulate or engage students in real-life literacy and reading? How might students get to reflect upon **how** they did a task, rather than whether they did it right?

### **Social Change**

Do comprehension activities for example, in your classes encourage critical analysis? What is the balance of print texts and other texts in your classrooms? Do you encourage reading films, commercials, billboards and brochures in critical ways? How do you acknowledge that students of different gender, ethnic and wealth groups may respond differently to the selection of texts and teaching strategies in your classroom? How do you negotiate with the diverse range of values that students bring into the classrooms?

The above issues are some of the themes that are stressed in real world tasks. The next section of the paper propounds Learning By Design as approached by the Multiliteracies approach that can pave ways to promoting meaningful and relevant literacy practices in English.



### Approaching Multiliteracies

The New London Group asserts that literacy pedagogy should connect with the changing social-economic environment, especially when the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary society calls for much broader perspectives of literacy than a narrow conception of language-based approaches. In coining the term multiliteracies, the New London Group seeks a more equitable social and cultural participation that connects with the real world.

Adopting the Multiliteracies as advanced by Cope and Kalantzis (2001), a project entitled the 'Learning by Design' project was undertaken by the researcher and some colleagues. The Learning by Design framework is strong on design where there is a combination of knowledge processes, encompassing four elements – experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying. The teacher's role becomes critical as she assesses the knowledge and skills of her students and works to design her learning and teaching materials according to the diversities and needs of the learners in the class and the wider community. The teacher is committed and attentive to experiences, tensions and power issues faced by her students (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001). She not only prepares her curriculum materials but also documents her observations, teaching practice and understandings of the social dynamics that operates in the classroom. She must also have the necessary ICT skills to engage in conversations and the obligation for professional enhancement. Evidently the agency of the teacher is of paramount importance in ensuring that the learning activities become meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. The Learning by Design project also works on the assumption that facilities like computer access, Internet and connectivity and electronic publishing tools are available to enhance collaboration and sharing of ideas among teachers, learners and the surrounding communities (see <http://www.L-by-D.com>). The following section looks at some of the early attempts of putting into action the 'Learning by Design' project in Malaysia.

### Background – Learning By Design Project

This 'Learning by Design' project involved an international team of researchers working with teachers to create and reflect upon the new emerging learning environments. Led by two distinguished Australian scholars, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, the project aimed to explore the potentials of new pedagogic approaches as advanced by multiliteracies. The project also aimed to transform conventional learning settings present in our communities to more relevant learning environments that are more appropriate to the real world.



### Teaching English: A Case-Study from Project Participants

This project involved a team of researchers from the International Literacy and Research Unit, Universiti Sains Malaysia working with teachers to create and reflect upon the new emerging learning environments<sup>1</sup>. Both Cope and Kalantzis briefed the teachers on the theoretical underpinnings of the Multiliteracies framework and the 'Learning By Design' project. The first workshop was attended by about fifty teachers from the northern region of Malaysia, including states like Penang, Kedah and Perak. There were teachers who were teaching English, Mathematics and Science. While the Multiliteracies approach was welcomed with much enthusiasm from the majority of the teachers, many of them opted not to participate in the project given the administrative and academic demands of teachers in an examination-oriented curriculum. Given that the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English was a very recent development, a large number of teachers who had originally been trained to teach the subjects in the Malay language felt rather uncomfortable about documenting their work in the English language. Nevertheless, there were several teachers who were totally excited and painstakingly followed through the different phases of the project.

### Learning By Design - Learning Elements

Kalantzis and Cope (2005) developed a Learning Theory focusing on knowledge processes. This pedagogical approach consists of four elements: Experiencing, Conceptualising, Analysing and Applying and can be briefly defined as follows:

◆ **Experiencing**

*The Known:* personal knowledge, evidence from students' everyday lives.

*The New:* immersion in new information and experiences.

◆ **Conceptualising**

*By Naming:* defining and applying concepts.

*By Theorising:* by putting the concepts together that make discipline knowledge.

◆ **Analysing**

*Functionally:* cause and effect, what things are for.

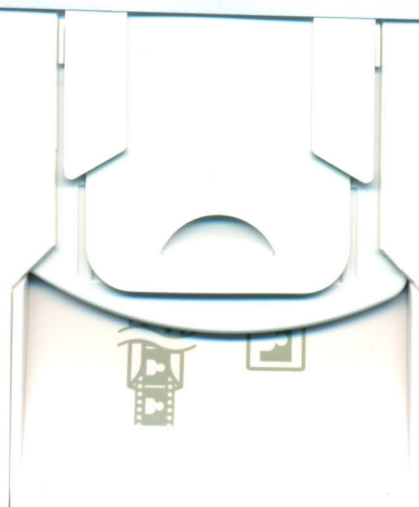
*Critically:* people's purposes, motives, intentions, points of view.

◆ **Applying**

*Appropriately:* 'correct' application of knowledge in a typical situation.

*Creatively:* innovative application of knowledge, or transfer to a different situation.

<sup>1</sup> Several researchers and teachers have come together to contribute to this ongoing project: Sarjit Kaur, Sacitnathan Tachinamoorthy, Shanthi Balraj, Parameswari Sarathee and Lee Bee Yong.



The above model was put to practice in selected schools in Malaysia (Ambigapathy & Shanthi, 2005) and the following is a sample resource material that was used to teach English. Parameswari Sarathee and Lee Bee Yong are two teachers from Perak who are teaching English to 14-year-olds in a secondary school. Just like many public secondary schools that adhere to a centralized curriculum, they noted that their English class had specific dominant characteristics. There was a lot of learning by rote where students were required to memorise many facts, sentence structures and model answers. Both teachers and students were focused on scoring high marks for the examinations. The teacher-centered classroom did not provide much room for students' voices and experiences. The teacher was the authoritative figure and she spoke while the students listened. There was hierarchy in the classroom and the teacher was seen as the powerful figure with the knowledge and skills. Learning refers to a quantity of information that has to be channeled from the teacher to the students and learning was based mainly on textbooks and workbooks. The teachers noted that their students had a low level of English proficiency, especially those coming from the rural areas. Many of the students learning English had negative attitudes towards the language.

The project participants, who were the teachers teaching English, on the other hand, were highly motivated and were bent on making their English lessons more meaningful. Parameswari and Lee were interested in the Multiliteracies framework and they were looking forward to re-inventing the English curriculum in the classroom. They were very enthusiastic about the whole project and were keen to explore if the learning theory can be appropriated in the Malaysian context.

Parameswari and Lee designed learning materials about their town and village for their English class. Their collaborative work was important as they were constantly sharing ideas and encouraging one and another to deliberate on the knowledge processes and the supporting learning elements and materials. In this case, they were interested in getting their students to learn more about their town, Teluk Intan and a nearby fishing village, Kampung Sg. Liang. They were interested in highlighting the diversities in their living areas and wanted to promote understandings of the facilities and differences between the town and village. The students were asked to locate information from books, actual real-life experience, photographs and the internet and they were to make power-point presentations. This enabled students to engage with the diversities present in their communities and to deliver their thoughts and expressions using new communications technologies.

They found out that the Learning theory and its pedagogical approach was most helpful and that the students were very excited that they could learn English in





very interesting ways. The students worked collaboratively and were proud that the works were being published in international websites. The Learning by Design model was put to practice in their classes and the following are extracts of sample resource material for English lessons developed by the school teachers<sup>2</sup>.

Sample Activity – English in the Classroom

TEACHER RESOURCE	LEARNER RESOURCE
	<b>English lesson - Form Two</b>
<b>PARAMASWARI A/P SARATHEE</b>	
<b>LEE BEE YONG</b>	

<sup>2</sup> The complete lesson model has been presented in numerous conferences and in the final report of Learning By Design, published by Cope and Kalantzis (2005)

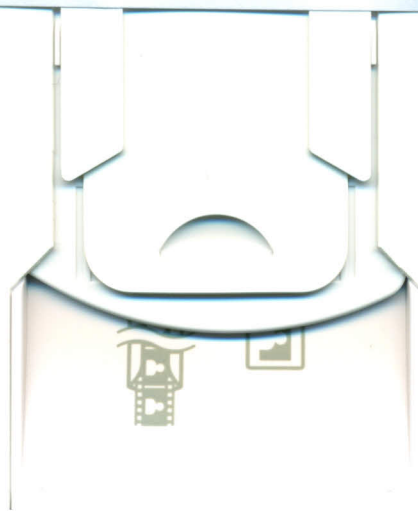
## CONTENTS PAGE - LIST OF ACTIVITIES AND TOPICS TO BE COVERED

<b>TEACHER RESOURCE</b>	<b>LEARNER RESOURCE</b>
<u>Content</u>	<u>Contents</u>
Learning Objectives	What You'll be Learning
Learning Activity 1: {Discussion about our town i.e. Teluk Intan}	Learning Activity 1: {Our Town}
Learning Activity 2: {A visit to an unfamiliar place i.e. Fishing Village}	Learning Activity 2: {Let's visit a fishing village}
Learning Activity 3 ; {Writing a glossary}	Learning Activity 3: {Listing & writing meanings of words}
Learning Activity 4 : {Mind Mapping}	Learning Activity 4: {Create a Mind map}
Learning Activity 5: {Making a comparison between a town and a fishing village}	Learning Activity 5: {Compare our town to a fishing village}
Learning Activity 6: {Expressing opinions and preferences}	Learning Activity 6: {Where would you rather live ?}
Learning Activity 7: {Drafting a plan of a dream town}	Learning Activity 7: {Planning our dream town}
Learning Activity 8: {Create a model of a dream town}	Learning Activity 8: {My Ideal Town}
Learning Activity 9: {Create a power point presentation-From a town to municipality}	Learning Activity 9: {Creating a power point- From a town to a municipality}
Learning Activity 10: {Bring it all together – burning work on CD-ROM, digital pictures, power point and model display for library, exhibition and school magazine}	Learning Activity 10: {Presenting our work}- Burning work on CD-ROM, digital pictures, photographs, power point and model display for library, exhibition and school magazine.
Assessment	How Well Have You Learnt?
Learning Pathways	Moving On



KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	FINDING OUT
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To Experience</i></p> <p>As a result of completing this Learning Element, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Talk and exchange information about their town, obtain information about an unfamiliar environment and municipality.</li> <li>■ Locate information from books, public library and the internet.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>By Being</i></p> <p>By doing this work you will learn about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Your town and the village.</li> <li>■ The facilities and differences between the town and the village.</li> <li>■ Locate information from books, actual real-life experience, photographs and the internet.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To Conceptualise</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Be able to use different sources to take notes: books, photographs, internet, questionnaires and interviewing people.</li> <li>■ Be able to use the power point.</li> <li>■ Be able to use digital photographs as a source of teaching.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>By Connecting</i></p> <p>By doing this work you will learn about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The town and the village.</li> <li>■ The facilities and differences between the town and the village.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To Analyse</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Expressing opinions – Power point</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>By Thinking About</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The advantages and disadvantages of living in a town/village.</li> <li>■ The differences between the town and the village.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To Apply</i></p> <p>Draw plan of a dream town.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Create a model.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>By Doing Things</i></p> <p>By creating our library display, we will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do research by taking notes and writing essays.</li> <li>■ Use a digital camera.</li> <li>■ Create a dream town.</li> </ul>

The first activity involved students talking about Teluk Intan, the town setting that was familiar to the students. The teachers and the students worked together to examine some of the main landmarks and buildings, people and their jobs as well as studied the pictures and photographs that were available in magazines, books and the Internet. Following this, the students made a visit to a fishing



village, Sungei Liang and explored the differences in the physical and cultural settings of the people. They explored the kinds of jobs and lifestyles of the people in the village. The third activity involved building a glossary where students had to make a list of words and write the meanings. Below are the samples of students' works.

### Learning Activity 3 – Writing a Glossary

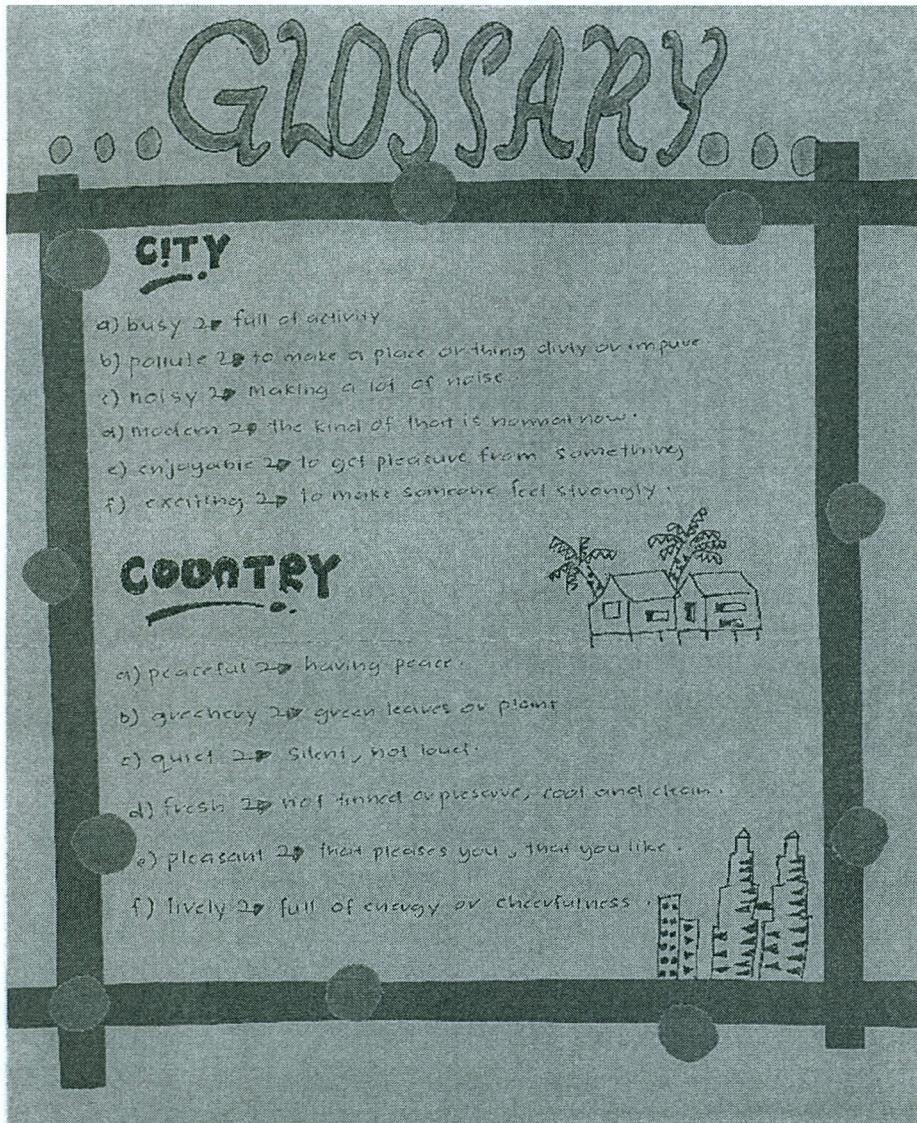
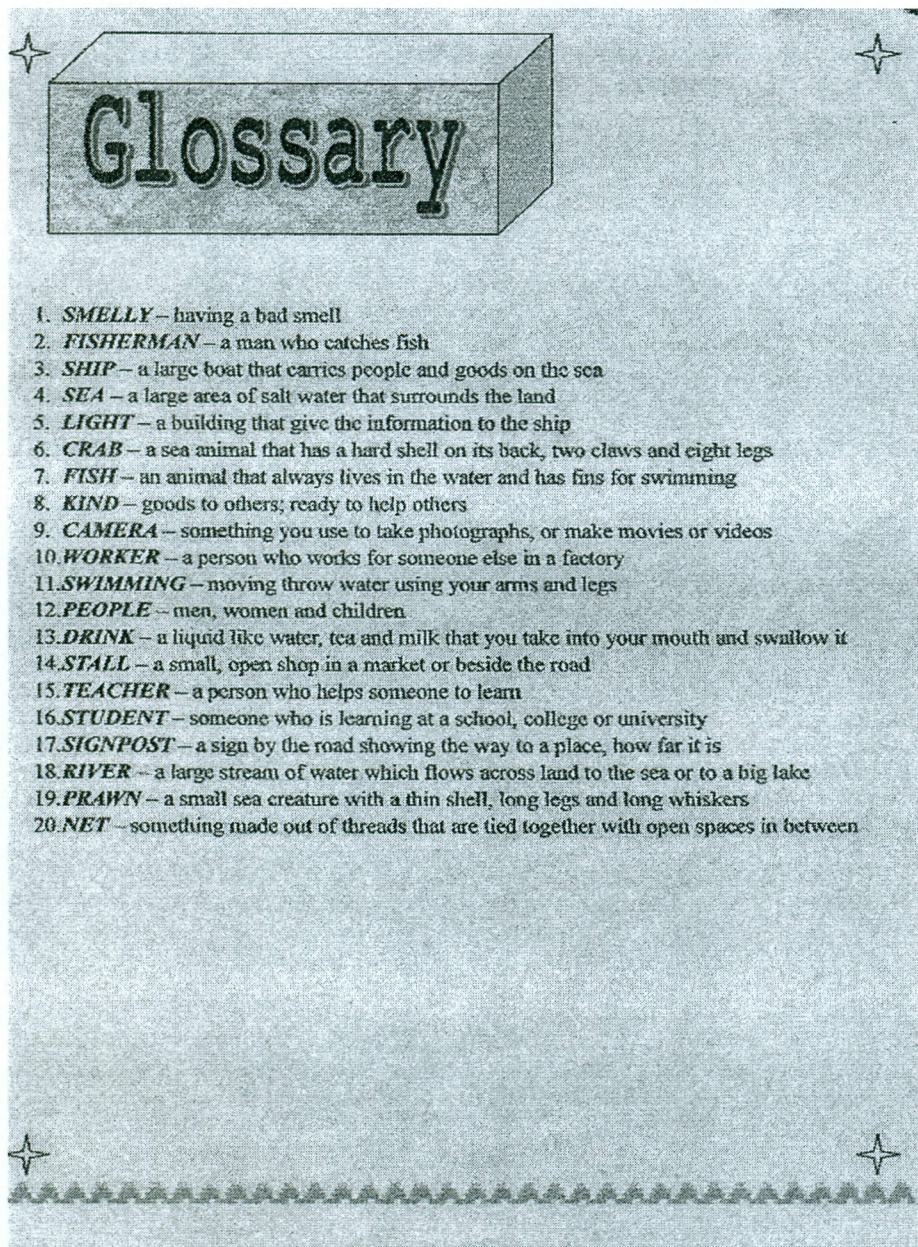
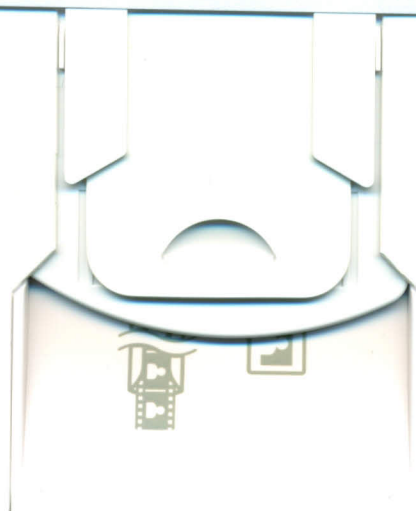


Exhibit A



**Exhibit B**

As can be seen above, the students had made good observations and captured some of the experiences and the meanings associated with the first two activities. The students had lots of fun as they prepared their exercises in very attractive and creative ways and these materials were displayed in the classroom.



The teachers then encouraged their students to study the public amenities available in both the town and the fishing village. The students identified facilities like the bank, post office, public telephones, hospitals, schools, modes of transport, places of worship like the mosque and the temple, which played an important role in the growth of communities. The students then presented these exercises in the form of mind maps as seen below.

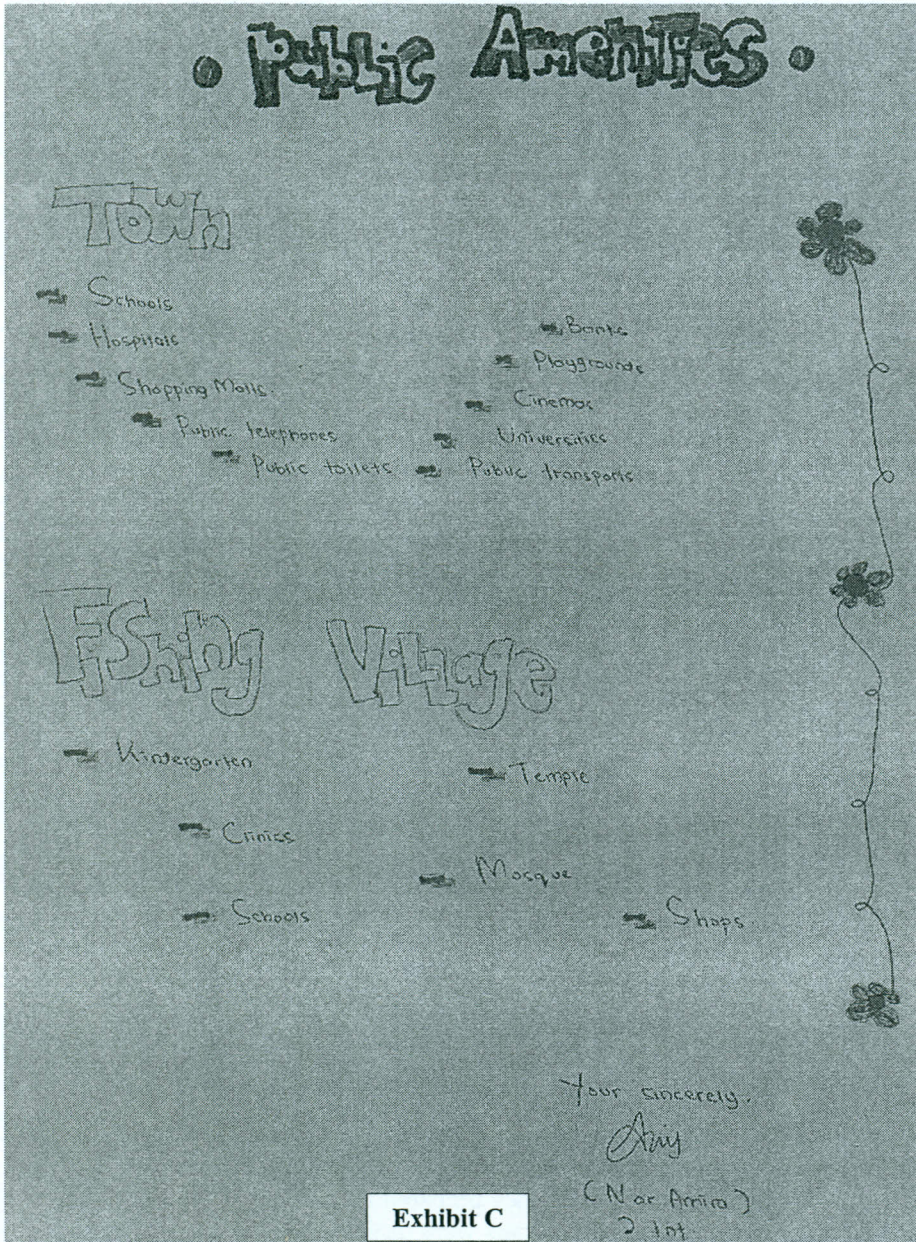
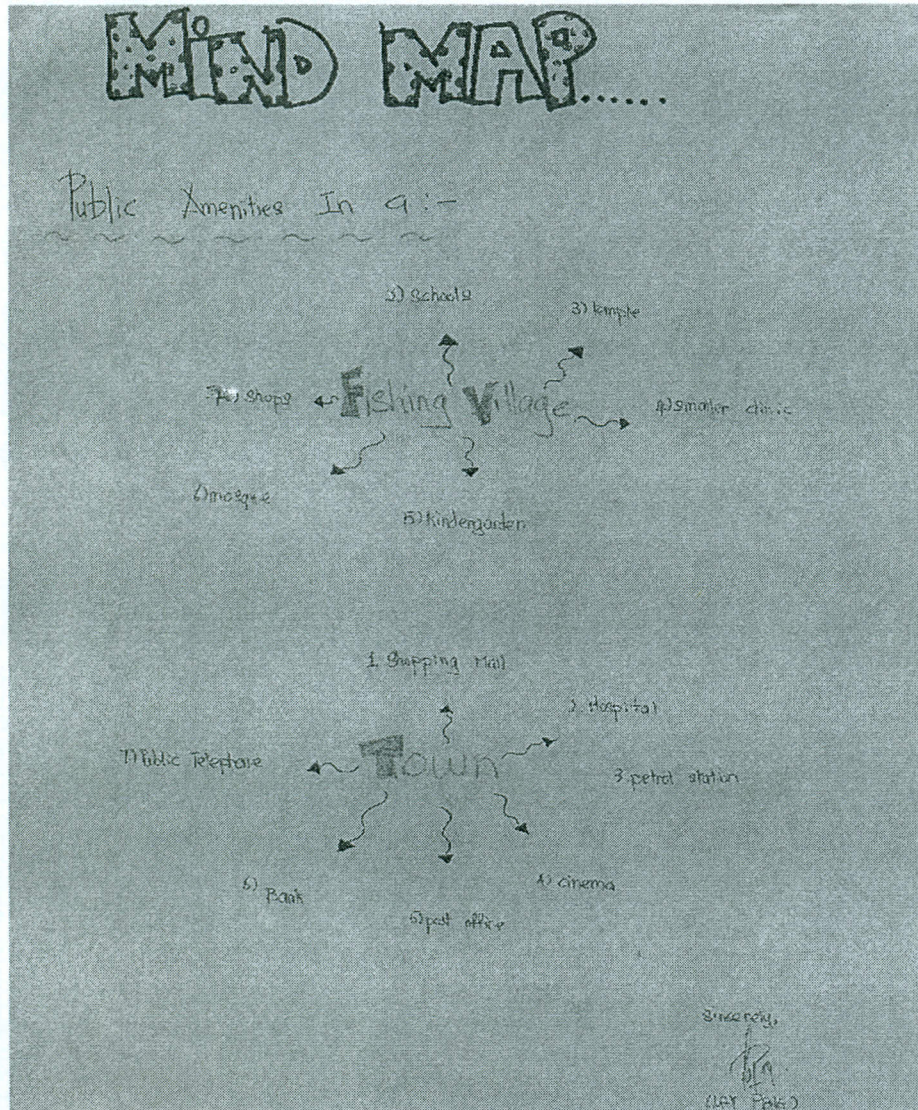


Exhibit C

**Learning Activity 4 – Mind Mapping**

As can be seen above, the students had made good observations and had captured some of the experiences and the meanings associated with the first two activities. These materials were displayed in the classroom.

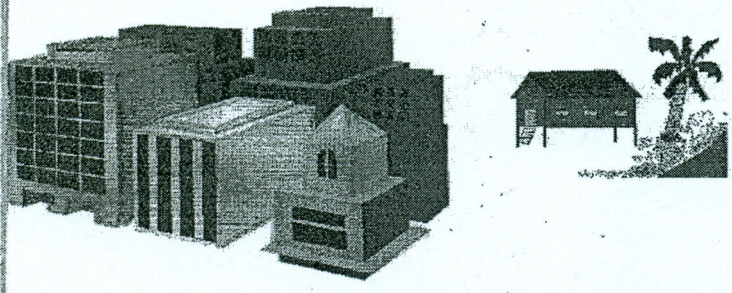


**Exhibit D**

The next activity involved the students writing short essays on the differences between living in the city and the village. The essays reveal that the students had

engaged with some interesting issues like public facilities, places of recreation, pollution, traffic difficulties, job opportunities and modern conveniences. One child also noted that she felt sad that some children in the fishing village did not go to school but instead worked with parents. In her essay (see Exhibit E), the student writes about a more interesting life in the city with its shopping centres, cinema and other recreation places. She also writes about pollution problems on the city. Some students highlight job opportunities in the city and thought that there were many educational opportunities available as there were more institutions of higher learning in towns.

### Learning Activity 5- Making comparisons between a town and a village



**The Differences Between Living In The City And Living In The Village**

There are many differences between living in the city and living in the village.

In the city, life is more interesting. It is because in the city, there are more facilities such as shopping complexes, public transport and public libraries. There are many places of entertainment and relaxation such as cinemas and sports stadium. There are also many interesting places to visit such as Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur Tower and others. There are many opportunities for further studies and finding jobs in the city.

Despitethis, in the city, there are more pollution than in the village . This is because of smoke from open burning, factories and vehicles. The high-rise building spoils the view too. Frequent traffic jams are also occur in the city.

Although the village don't have many facilities, living there is more peaceful. The air is more fresher than in the city. The village is less polluted than the city. The people are cooperative and they work together. It is also windy because the village don't have high building there.

So, the city and the village have a lot of differences. But, they has one similiar thing, that is the place where we can live and it is so important to us.

Exhibit E



# About... FISHING Villages...

Living in the city is expensive, but living in the fishing village is wonderful.

Living in the fishing village is wonderful because it is peaceful, harmonious and quiet. At the fishing village, there are many things we can do for example catch fish and sailing in a boat.

One fishing village in Teluk Intan is in Hutan Melintang. Hutan Melintang is a very famous place. But there is one thing we all don't like that is their smell.

I think living in the country side like a fishing village is good. It is safe, fresh, harmonious, peaceful and free from air pollution.

We hope Hutan Melintang can be a famous place in Perak.



Exhibit F

The teachers tried to use a variety of approaches to enable their students to express their views. Below are some examples in the form of dialogues and songs. The students also used a lively mix of visuals, colours and print forms in their exercises.



Learning Activity 6: Expressing opinion and preference

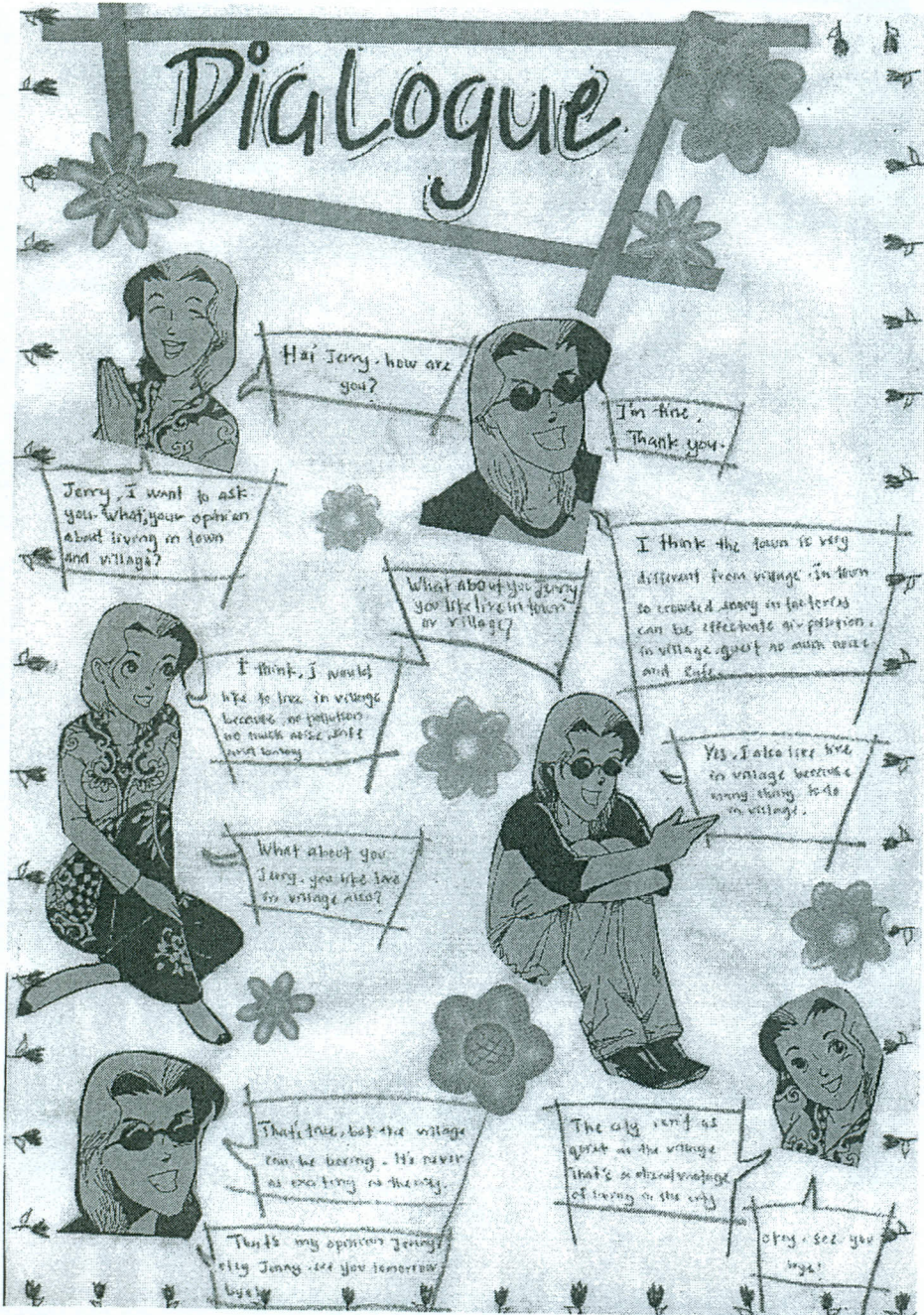
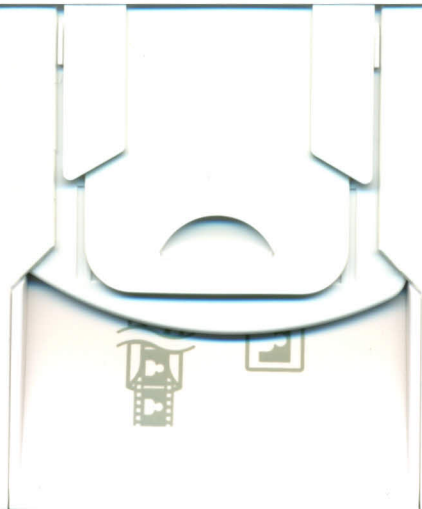


Exhibit G



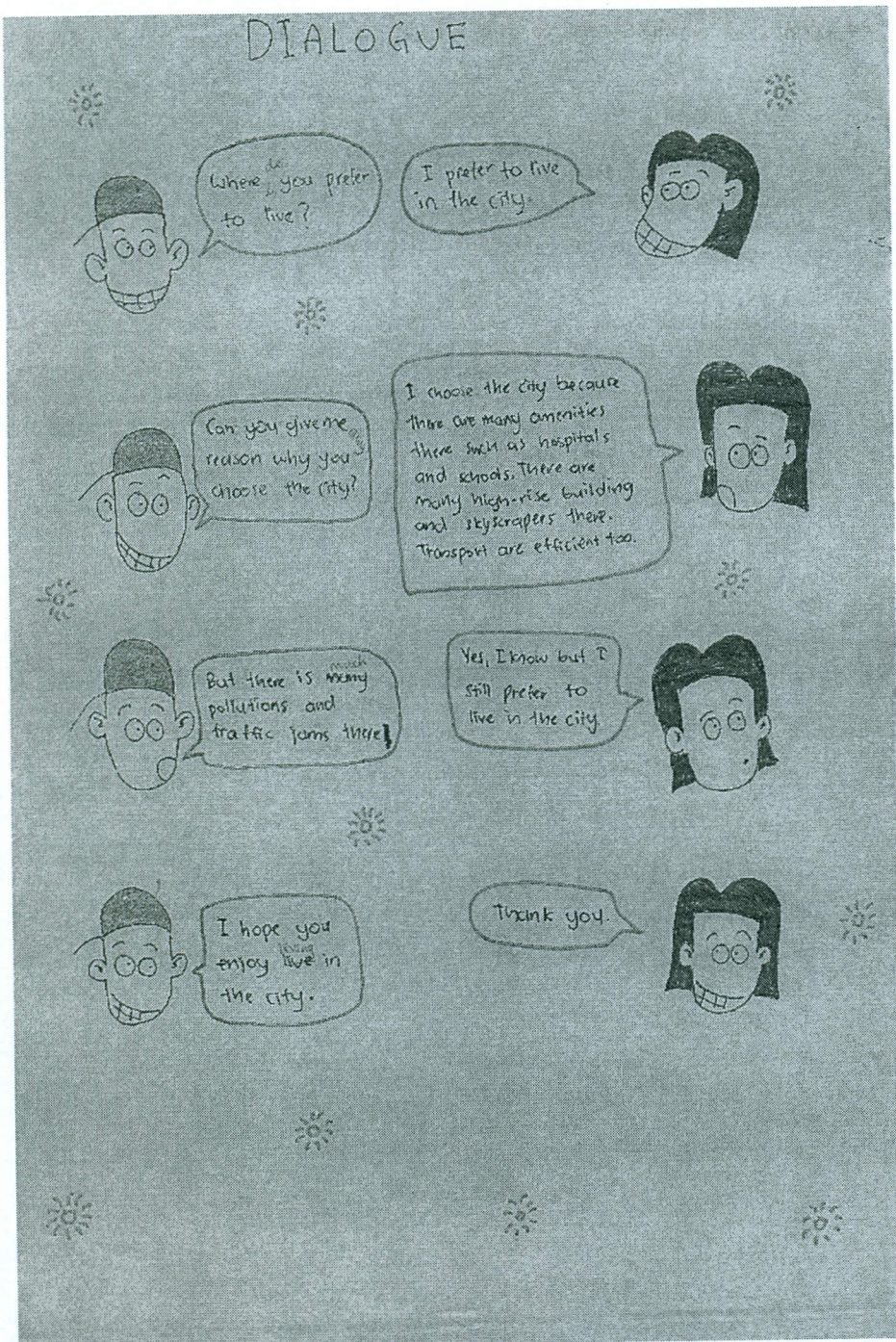


Exhibit H

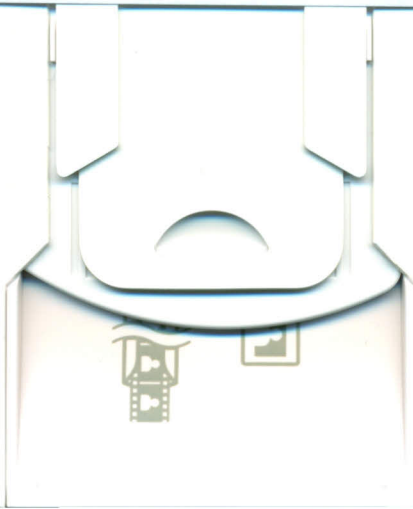
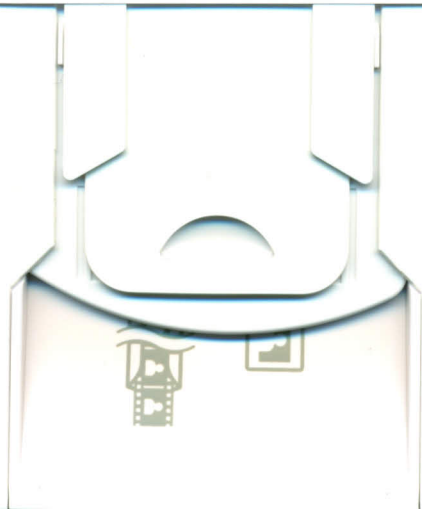




Exhibit I



# WANT TO SING

## LIVING IN COUNTRYSIDE

\* I love to live in the countryside,  
With a friendly chat and beauty scenery,  
And peaceful as a cemetery,  
Pretty girls are everywhere,  
Giving smile to everyone.

I love to live in the countryside,  
Flowers bloom and bird singing in the sky,  
People lives in harmony,  
No confusion all around,  
People lives in happily.

So we had joy, we had fun  
Living in the countryside  
Harmony, peacefully,  
People laughing all day long (2x)

REPEAT \*







Exhibit J



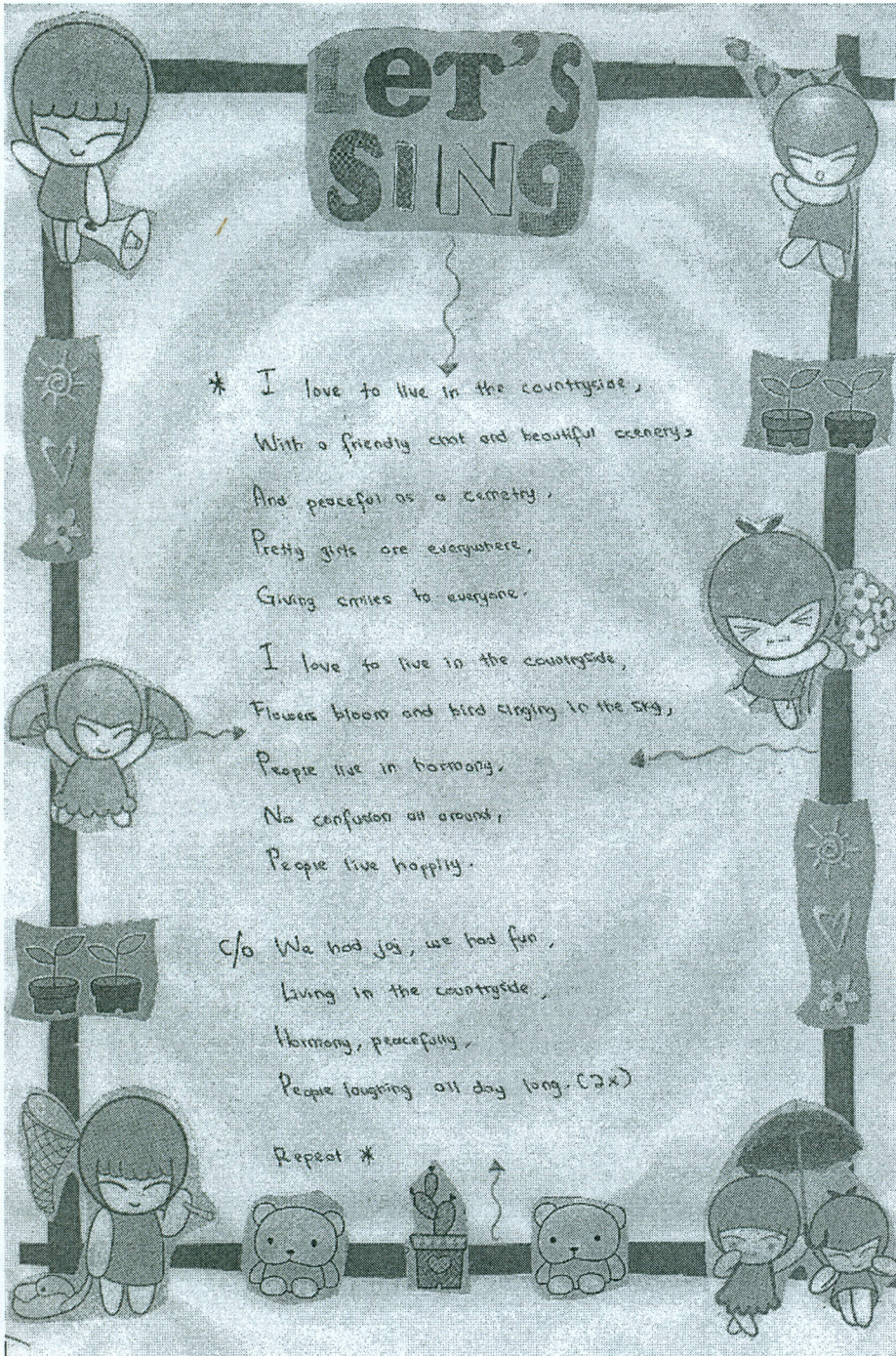


Exhibit K

As seen in the above, the songs have interesting lines,

*I love to live in the countryside  
With friendly chat and beautiful scenery  
Peaceful as a cemetery  
Pretty girls are everywhere  
Giving smiles to everyone (see Exhibit K)*

After the discussion of the students' views on the differences in living in the city and living in the village, the teachers then asked the students to draft their plan of a dream town. Working in groups, the students shared their ideas and worked collaboratively to plan their dream towns.

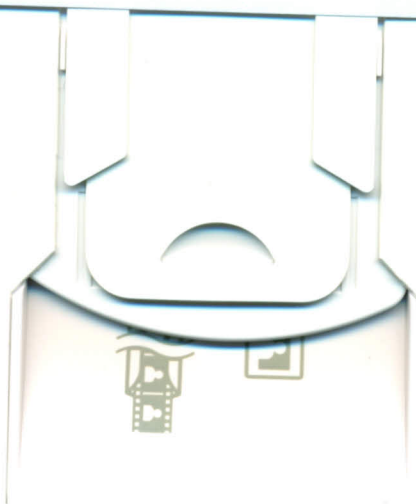
The sample activities above demonstrate the commitment by the teachers. They provide positive stories that illuminate teachers' changing attitudes about teaching and learning to support teacher development. The initiatives by the teachers are important for all teachers interested in making better connections with students' understandings of the real world.

### Conclusion

The educational task that aims to build the human capital of the country visioning for a developed status by 2020 is a challenging one. During the next 15-year phase to 2020, Malaysia will need to deal with great changes in the local and global environment to pursue programmes that enhance the people's capability to compete globally, to strengthen national unity and to bring about a better distribution of income and wealth as well as a higher quality of life. There are many factors that need to come together in order to meet the Malaysian 2020 Vision of a fully developed nation. This paper gives attention to the teacher factor.

Pre-school, kindergarten, primary and secondary school and tertiary-level teachers play a vital role in the development of young people. What young people learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work and their personal lives. Pre-school children learn mainly through play and interactive actions. Pre-school and primary teachers can enable children to connect to the real world by taking advantage of children's play to further language and vocabulary development (using storytelling, rhyming games and acting games) and improve social skills (having children to work together to build a model of a fishing village).

Secondary school teachers help students to delve more deeply into the subjects introduced in primary schools and expose them to more real-life situations. Teachers can engage with a wide variety of fields such as healthcare, tourism,



business and communications. The technological, economic and social factors discussed at the beginning of this paper come to occupy an integral role in the English classroom. New information and communication technologies can expose students to a vast range of experiences and promote interactive learning. Through the Internet, students can gather, read and produce texts for their projects. Students can also communicate with other students to share experiences and differing viewpoints. The increasing significance accorded to ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds means that teachers will also have to work more effectively to include multicultural lesson planning in order to enhance awareness and understanding of different cultures.

The Learning By Design underpinned by the Multiliteracies approach allows teachers to use real-life, lifelike and focused learning episodes to ensure that students understand how to combine and recombine their available resources in order to engage in effective literacy practices in a range of contexts, using various platforms.

This paper has attempted to stimulate conversations about literacy by examining the current changes taking place in the world today and by presenting sample activities that can enhance language teaching in the Malaysian classroom. It is hoped that teachers may now be in a better position to plan further journeys along the pathways to literate futures. English language teachers, in particular should now use/modify the ideas discussed in this paper to the needs of their students. Ideas are precious commodities, preparation is invaluable, and knowledge is essential when it comes to the pursuit of great achievements. But ideas, preparation, and knowledge are useless without action, because action is the starting point of all progress. It is action that converts an idea into reality. Being a problem solver is a valuable skill. But knowing how to turn problems into opportunities is an *invaluable* skill. When teachers solve a problem, they are basically treading water. But when they are able to see an opportunity in every problem, and have the ability to transform it into value in the marketplace, we have the potential to achieve exponential success. As the popular saying goes, "Life is meant to be lived, and action is the essence of living."

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