

Holistic Learning in Chinese Language through Philosophy for Children

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Abstract: There have always been concerns for the development of the Chinese Language (CL) in Singapore, from the promotion of bilingualism to the execution of new Chinese initiatives such as “Recognize First, Write Later”. In 2004, the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (MOE, 2004) proposed a set of objectives for CL teaching, it includes:

1. Getting the students to develop an interest in the language and culture well after they leave school and,
2. Emphasis on the effective oral communication and reading.

The Committee has also suggested new pedagogical methods to achieve the proposed objectives. However, despite new methods of teaching CL, the objectives do not address the need of a holistic learning education for students learning CL. For students to have a holistic understanding of the subject, teaching them the basic applications of the subject is insufficient. We need to foster them to be good thinkers as this is crucial for their life successes.

Therefore, a model based on the ideology of cultivating a Holistic Learning Experience in Second Language (HLESL) was developed. This model consists of three levels, which in summary are: 1) technical learning, 2) learning of Chinese culture and heritage, and 3) learning of Competencies. HLESL aims to help students to gain a holistic experience in CL and this experience would enable them to maximize their use of CL potential in their academic and non-academic lives.

To train students to engage with the HLESL, a suitable method is needed. The Philosophy for Children (P4C) method developed by Dr Matthew Lipman was chosen as the method for this study. P4C provides reasoning and logical thinking training through series of skilful questioning. This paper will thus report on an on-going study in which P4C is used to foster students’ engagement with the HLESL model.

Keywords: Holistic Learning, Philosophy for Children

Introduction: The Holistic Education in Singapore

The goals in Singapore education are to nurture our young Singaporeans to have an inquiring mind and the desire of creating a better society. Our education aims to foster every children’s talents and to prepare them to face future challenges and setbacks, and have the perseverance to work towards their own dreams and goals (Tharman, 2004). As such, the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced several initiatives like the Thinking School, Learning Nation (TSLN) in 1997, Innovative and Enterprise (I&E) in 2003, Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) in 2004, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in 2005. All these different initiatives hold a common objective to work towards the Desired Outcome of Education. We want to develop the child morally, intellectually, physically, socially and aesthetically (MOE, 2004). In short, our Desired Outcome of Education is to foster a holistic child through a holistic education system.

To foster a holistic child, it is important that in each of our curricular subjects like English, Chinese Language, Science and Mathematics, have the elements and strategies to provide the child with a holistic learning experience.

This paper will report on an on-going research on the study of creating a holistic learning experience in Chinese Language using Philosophy for Children (P4C).

Problem Statement: The existence of holistic learning elements in Chinese Language?

There have always been concerns for the development of the Chinese language in Singapore, from the promotion of bilingualism to the execution of new Chinese pedagogical methods such as “Recognize First, Write Later”. In 2004, the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (MOE Press Release, 2004) proposed a set of objectives for Chinese language teaching and it includes,

1. Getting the students to develop an interest in the language and culture well after they leave school and,
2. Emphasis on the effective oral communication and reading.

The Committee has placed greater emphasis on developing fluency and confidence in oral communication, and early proficiency in character recognition and reading. The emphasis on these practical skills will enable students to use CL more frequently, and thereby sustain their interest in the language (MOE, 2004). The Committee has also proposed the use of materials that are more engaging and IT resources to facilitate students’ interest in learning Chinese Language. The key aim of all these different activities is to get students to develop an interest in the Chinese language and to transmit traditional culture and values to the students.

Furthermore, in recent years, with the rise of Chinese influences in the region, intensified emphasis has been put on the teaching and learning of Chinese Language. Pedagogies concentrating on getting students to understand the language have extended to understanding the cultural aspects of China’s history and heritage. Though, many different pedagogical approaches have been carried out to cultivate students grasp of the language, few have gone into the area of using Chinese as a pedagogical tool to foster holistic learning of Chinese Language in students. In education today, it is not just enough to teach students the content and application of the subjects. Students studying Chinese may learn about the usage of the language and the values and culture it entails, but for the students to make it a meaningful life experience, the holistic approach needs to be in existence in the teaching of Chinese Language, which seems to be lacking in our education system of teaching Chinese Language.

Hypothesis: The Holistic Learning Experience of Second-Language Framework (HLESL)

According to David Perkins (1992), all natural languages have a rich vocabulary of thinking. Language itself consider terms like hypothesis making, reasoning, finding of evidence, judging possibility, conjuring imagination, handling different perspectives, and routine use of such words would helps students catch on to the nuances of thinking and thoughtfulness that such terms represent. Furthermore, the goal of education is to prepare students for the challenges of the future and to develop them in the Moral, Cognitive, Physical, Social and Aesthetic spheres. Therefore, we need foster generative knowledge helps students to understand and deal with their world (Papastrat, 1999). This generative knowledge would enable students to handle themselves in different situations. Knowledge is not just about acquiring a series of facts but being able to utilize these facts in real life

situations, to solve problems and better lives. Thus, to enhance the learning experience of the students, students need to go beyond just learning the language and speaking it.

Therefore, a model framework based on the ideology of cultivating a Holistic Learning Experience in Second Language (HLESL) was developed.

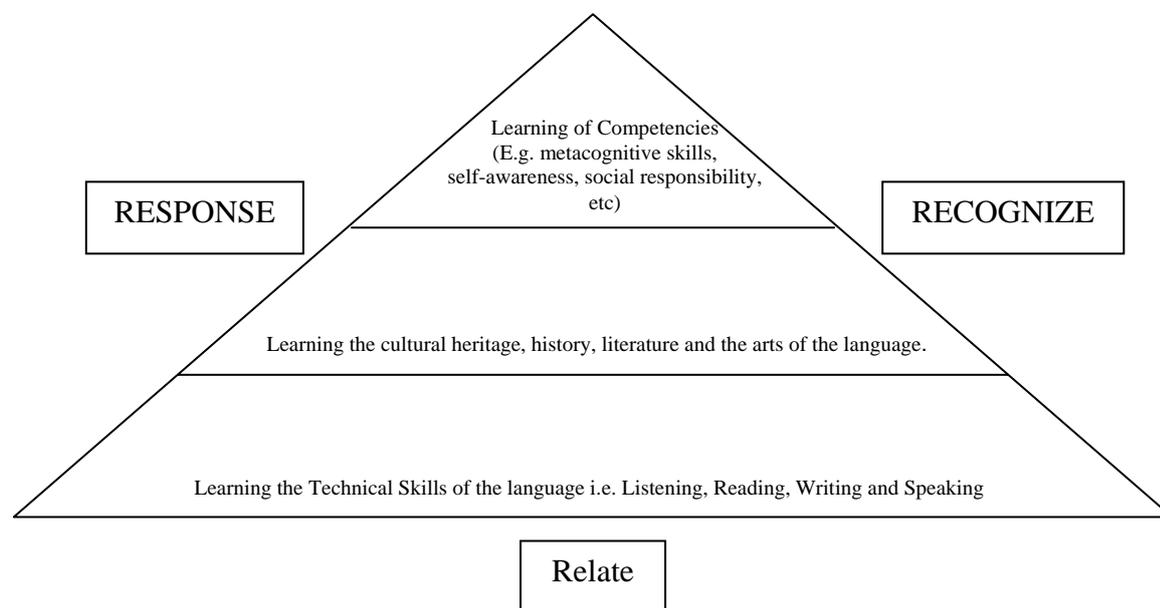


Figure 1: *Holistic Learning Experience in Second Language (HLESL) Framework*

In the Holistic Learning Experience in Second-Language framework (HLESL) show above, the base of this pyramid framework encompasses the first objective of learning Chinese Language that is the technical learning of the language. This base would form the foundation of the holistic learning experience, as students at this stage would be able to learn the basic application of the language in terms of listening, reading, writing and speaking. This is to ensure that students would be able to have a basic grasp of their literacy skills before proceeding on to the next level in learning of the language. In the second level, as according to the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee, students would learn the appreciation of the language. At this level, students would learn to understand the meanings behind the language through the arts, history and literature written. This would serve the students to understand and appreciate the language itself better and for students to form meanings of the language. In the final level of the HLESL, students should learn the different competencies such as deep thinking, logical reasoning and questioning using the language. The learning of these different competencies would help to foster students' metacognitive abilities and help them to engage a deeper understanding of themselves and others around them.

Beside the three levels of learning existing in the pyramid, there are three other elements outside the pyramid which functions as tools for the application of skills learnt within the pyramid, that would contribute to the holistic learning of second language, they are: Relate, Recognize and Response.

1. Relate: Students need to be able to relate their own learning to their surrounding that is their family, community, society and country. This is the basis of the holistic

education – “Know Thyself”. Students must through the learning, examine his or her own assumptions by relating it to their every day living experiences.

2. Recognize: Rousseau pointed out that every child should be allowed to explore the world and make his or her own discoveries (Miller, 1988). Therefore, through the learning, students should recognize from their discoveries, the usage and applicability of their skills and abilities. Self-awareness would enable the students to recognize their own skills and functionality towards their family, community, society and country.
3. Response: It is no use learning a skill without the actual application of it. As Francisco Ferrer pointed out, students need to be immersed in social issues so that they can develop a sense of critical awareness (Miller, 1988). Therefore, students need to use their learnt skills, competencies and abilities to respond to the issues around them. It is then through such action that will help raise the students’ self-consciousness of themselves and their learning.

Therefore, through the HLESL, students would be able to gain a holistic understanding and experience in Chinese Language and this holistic learning experience would enable them to maximize their use of Chinese language potential in their academic and non-academic lives.

Strategy to foster HLESL

Dr. Matthew Lipman developed a thinking programme called The Philosophy for Children (P4C) in the early 1960s. This programme aims to build on the students’ own wonder and curiosity about ideas that are vital to them. P4C provides reasoning and logical thinking training through skilful questioning. The programme is suitable for children, from kindergarten through secondary school.

P4C aims to build on the students’ own wonders and curiosities about ideas that are important to them. The subject matter of P4C is those common, central and contestable concepts that underpin both our experience in life and all academic disciplines. Examples of such concepts to name a few are: truth, love, friendship, time and beauty (Saeed, 2003). As such, the subject matter of P4C coincides with those of Civics and Moral Education (CME), which emphasizes on the students’ moral reasoning skills and the ability to handle moral dilemmas. However, P4C looks beyond moral reasoning as P4C also includes interest, emotion, values, ethics, communality and critical thinking. Furthermore, the intention of P4C coincides with the objectives set by the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee and even goes beyond that to look into the area of higher order thinking and character development; it seeks to develop intellectual and moral character of the students, which would fulfill the criteria as proposed earlier in figure 1 HLESL Framework.

Background Literature

In 1996, the Buranda State School in Brisbane, introduced the P4C Programme to all classes in an attempt to improve the thinking skills of its pupils, thereby to improve their academic and social skills. It is an on-going project into its 9th year of implementation. Mrs. Lynne Hinton, the principal, chooses to use P4C materials produced by ACER rather than Lipman’s original novels like *Pixie* or *Kio and Gus*. In-service was provided for all teachers and each class participated in two 30-minute sessions weekly. Positive transfer effects of P4C on children’s academic results are very impressive and convincing. No standardized tests have been used to measure the gains in reasoning and metacognitive skills by the children yet.

In 2003, A/P Agnes Chang Shook Cheong and her research team initiated a critical thinking project using P4C. A/P Chang study aims to:

1. Train primary teachers to be reflective teachers and imbue them with good questioning techniques to promote critical and analytical thinking in their pupils.
2. Develop primary pupils into critical thinkers with good logical reasoning skills.

It was conceptualized as a longitudinal study on the impact of teaching P4C to a group of primary pupils in a neighbourhood school for three semesters from Primary 3 to Primary 4 on their reasoning and analytical skills and their achievement in English, Mathematics and Science. The initial observation results of the project were very positive and encouraging. The children participating in the study were conscious of the transfer of reasoning and analytical skills to their daily behaviours.

The Study of Fostering Holistic Learning in Chinese Language using Philosophy for Children in a Primary School

The target group for this research is Primary 5 students. Primary 5 was chosen, as students at this stage would have already acquired the basic understanding of the Chinese language including Hanyu Pinyin (HP), which would be taught to the students at Primary 1 and Primary 2 level.

The research is set to be an interventional study of one year involving two classes of Primary 5 students.

Methodology

A qualitative research design using content analysis with the combination of videography is being adopted in this research. Quantitative test such as the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTR) developed by Shipman (1983) will also be used to assess the pre-post effect of the intervention of both the classes. The reason of using content analysis in this research is to determine how critical thinking is developed through the intervention and whether students would be able to gain a holistic learning experience in Chinese language as proposed in figure 1 through using P4C as an intervention pedagogical tool.

Implementation of P4C

A/P Philip Cam's Teachers Resource and Thinking Stories will be used as a guide in carrying out P4C lesson. Other materials will include Asia Pac illustrated Chinese storybooks. Asia Pac storybooks deal with the different aspects of philosophy. Thus they would be appropriate as part of the teaching materials for P4C.

The research proposed that the P4C lesson be carried out during the Civic and Moral education lesson period once every week. In Singapore, CME is taught in the Mother tongue and students are taught moral reasoning and moral values in Chinese, Tamil and Malay. Therefore, as the nature of P4C lesson incorporates the examination of values and life issues, it would be more suitable for it to be conducted during the CME period. Furthermore being a non-examinable subject, students would feel less stressful by the lesson.

Conducting of a Chinese P4C Lesson

Sample Lesson: Getting students to familiarize what P4C is and the Question Quadrant.

The aim of this lesson were to get students to familiarize with the whole idea of P4C and. Students were taught of the ground rules of a P4C lessons such as the following:

仔细聆听

To listen attentively

尊重其他同学的意见

To respect others' views

思考

To think

发问

To question

讨论

To discuss

要为自己的每一个答案提供理由

To give reasons for every answers

Students were also being taught on the Question Quadrant developed by A/P Philip Cam in 2006, however the materials were translated into Chinese to teach to the students. The materials for the lesson were as follow:



有一天维尼熊与粉红猪在雪地上散步。这一天太阳带有一丝的暖意照在大地上。粉红猪身上穿着一件棉衣，他的颈项围着一条张张的粉红围巾。而维尼熊身上并没有穿什么衣服除了一件窄小的衬衫。

粉红猪看着维尼熊说，“维尼熊，我们会是永远的好朋友吗？”

维尼熊对粉红猪笑了一笑说，“我们会比永远来得更久更长？”

Pooh and Piglet can be seen trudging along a snowy track. The day is clear but the sun is low and it casts a yellowish-orange glow over the scene. Piglet is wrapped in woolens and a scarf, while Pooh has nothing on but an old short-sleeved top that is several sizes too small for him. Piglet says to Pooh touchingly, ‘We will be friends forever, won’t we Pooh?’ ‘Even longer,’ Pooh replies.

Some questions about this little scene

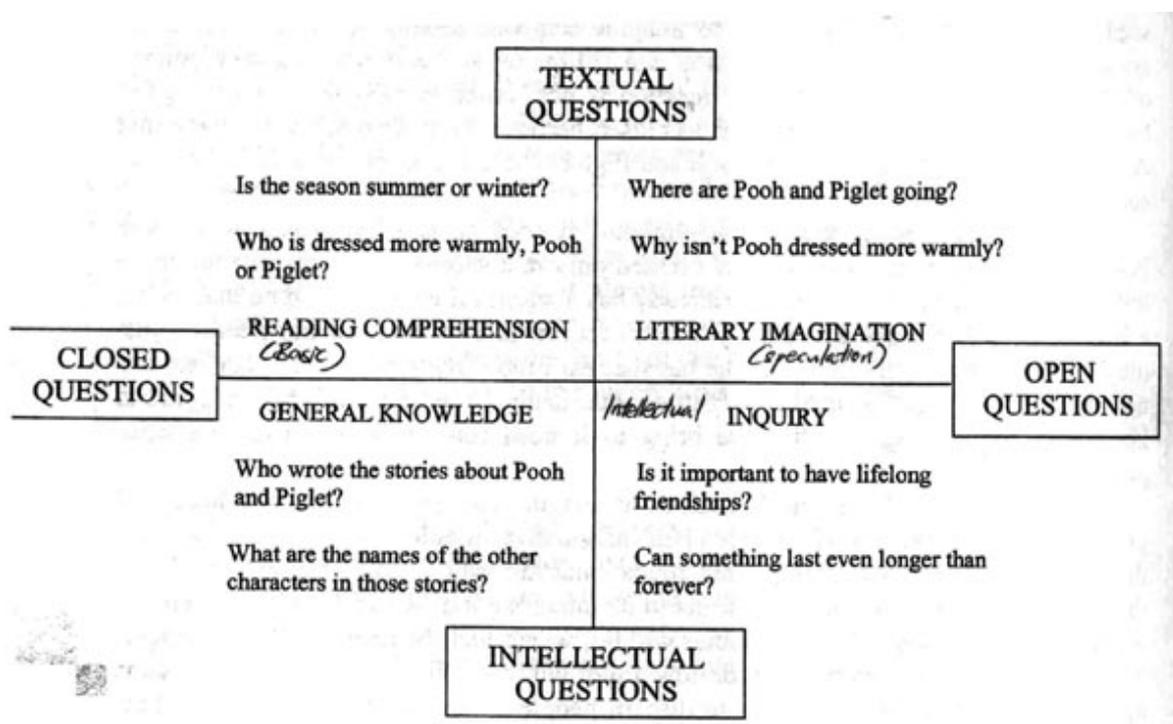
<p>现在是冬天还是春天? 谁穿得比较温暖 维尼熊与粉红猪要去哪里? 为什么维尼熊穿得如此少的衣服? 维尼熊的故事是谁写的? 故事里其他人物的名字? 我们需要永远的友情吗? 有什么东西可以比永远来的更久更长呢?</p>	<p>Is the season summer or winter? Who is dressed more warmly, Pooh or Piglet? Who wrote the stories about Pooh and Piglet? What are the names of the other characters in those stories? Where are Pooh and Piglet going? Why isn't Pooh Dressed more warmly Is it important to have lifelong friendships? Can something last even longer than forever?</p>
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The Question Quadrant

课本型问题

单一型问题	1. 现在是冬天还是春天? 2. 谁穿得比较温暖	1. 维尼熊与粉红猪要去哪里? 2. 为什么维尼熊穿得如此少的衣服?	深度型问题
	1. 维尼熊的故事是谁写的? 2. 故事里其他人物的名字?	1. 我们需要永远的友情吗? 2. 有什么东西可以比永远来的更久更张?	

智慧型问题



At the end of the lesson, students were asked to write on what they have learnt from the lesson, and below are some of the students' sample reflections:

Sample 1:

我觉得哲学对我们很有意义。它叫我们要尊重其他同学们的意见，而不要随便说个理由。

I feel that philosophy is very meaningful to us. It teaches us to respect others' views and not to give reasons without thinking it through.

Sample 2:

今天我学到了每个答案要有一个理由。因为如果没有一个理由，就没有意思了。我也学到如果你不明白一些事，就要发问。我觉得这是很重要因为你如果不发问，你就永远不会明白。

Today, I have learnt that we must have a reason for every answer. Because if there isn't a reason, then the answer would be meaningless. I have also learnt that if you do not understand something, then you must ask about it. I feel that this is very important, because if you do not ask, you will never understand.

Sample 3:

我觉得哲学对我们很有意义。它可以让我们思考，让我们更聪明。

I feel that philosophy is very meaningful because it allows us to think and we will become smarter.

Sample 4:

我今天学会了四种问题- 课本型问题，深度型问题，智慧型问题和单一型问题。我最喜欢课本型问题，因为它不会像其它的问题，要用自己的想法还是要有的智慧。课本型问题是可以从课本里找出答案。

Today I learnt that there are four types of questions – textual questions, open questions, intellectual questions and closed questions. I like textual questions the most, because unlike the other three types of questions, which requires me to think on my own, I can find the answers for textual questions from the book.

We can see from the sample reflections that students understand the importance of philosophy in helping them in their thinking and reasoning. However, interestingly enough we can see from one of the sample reflections that students have also expressed that they prefer to get answers straight from the book rather than thinking on their own. This is a cause for us to worry, because if students were to have this learning mentality it will impaired them in their holistic learning. Furthermore, they would not be able to tackle the unforeseen challenges that they will face in the future. Therefore, it is without a doubt that we need to foster students to be do deep thinking, search for their own answers and make meaning of it rather than to refer to the books for answers all of the time.

Sample Lesson 2: Discussion about what is beauty?

The objective of this lesson is to challenge students' understanding of the term beauty and factors, which we use to define beauty. Towards the end of the lesson, students were asked to reflect on what they have understood about beauty. The following were sample responses gathered from the students.

Sample 1:

我觉得人的内在美才是最重要的。因为如果人的外表很美丽但是内在却是自私的，那就不是美丽了

I feel that inner beauty is the most important. Because if a person is very pretty but is very selfish, then that isn't true beauty.

Sample 2:

我认为内心是比较重要的。因为如果你的外表很好看，但是很残忍，到处杀人放火，有什么用呢？人不可貌相，海水不可斗量。

I feel that inner beauty is more important. Because if you are good looking, but you are selfish and goes around hurting and harming people, then what is the point of looking good outside? As the saying goes, never judge a book by its cover.

Sample 3:

美对我来说就像一个花朵盛开一样。如果花朵枯了，它外表会像一个人放弃他的生活似的。有时候一个很美的姑娘可能会有一个狼心狗肺的心肠。所以，外表是不重要的，最重要的就是各人的心肠。

Beauty to me is like a blooming flower. If the flower were to wilt, its appearance will be like a person giving up his life. A pretty lady maybe evil-hearted. Therefore, external beauty is not important. What is more important is the person's heart.

Sample 4:

一个女人如果她是当一名演员或歌手或模特儿，那她的外观是非常重要的。那如果一个普通人只有外观，没有内在美他就有如一个花瓶。但如果花瓶里有很多美丽的花儿，那就更漂亮了！这就像一个人一样，要有外观和内在美，才是一个很漂亮的人，所以我觉得外观和内在美都很重要。

If a girl is an actress, a singer or a model, then her appearance is very important. However, for a normal person to have looks and no inner beauty, she will be just like a vase. But if a vase have lots of beautiful flowers in it, then it will be very pretty. This is just like a human, it is important to have both inner and external beauty to makes a person truly beautiful.

From the two sample lessons and the responses gathered from the students' assignment, we can see that students are able to give meaningful reasons for their answers and that they are able to compare and contrast the importance of matters and draw meaningful conclusion to justify their own stand.

Construction of Philosophical Questioning from Chinese Text

Besides conducting a P4C Chinese lesson, it is possible to infuse P4C into the Chinese text and engage with students to do deeper thinking with reference to the text.

The following is an example of how the text can be infused with P4C. This particular chapter was taken out from “公民与道德教育 –五上”. The objective of the lesson was to teach the students the concept of promises and the importance of it. The whole story can be broken into parts and at each point; questions can be posed for the students to discuss. This is to enable students to slowly construct the meaning and understanding of promises.

Example of infusing P4C into the Chinese Text:

Text Title

我不让妈妈担心

I would not let my mother worry about me.

今天上午，我到学校去参加课程辅助活动。活动结束后，我看到许多同学聚集在学院的一个角落，好像在讨论些什么。明文叫我过去，问我要不要和他们一起去白沙公园骑脚踏车。

This morning, I went to school for my CCA. After my CCA have ended, I saw a group of my friends gathered at a corner discussing about something. Ming Wen called me over and asked me whether I want to go to Pasir Ris Park with them to cycle.

我想了一会儿，告诉他们我不想去。虽然明文不断劝我敢他们一起去，我还是拒绝了。

I thought for awhile and replied him that I would not join them. However, Ming Wen tried to persuade me to go but I stand firm on my decision.

讨论问题

1. 假设你已答应你的一名朋友帮他做件事，但你最好的朋友突然要你的帮忙，你该怎么办？
2. 你会为了自己的利益而违反你之前所许下的承诺吗？

Discussion Questions

1. You have already promised a friend to help him in a task. However, your best friends have approached you suddenly to ask for your help at the same time, what would you do?
2. Would you break a promise to fulfill your own interest?

回家时，我一面走，一面想：今天风和日丽，白沙公园会更加美丽吧？在那里骑脚踏车多好！但是我答应妈妈活动一结束就回家。我如果迟回，她一定会很担心的。

On the way home, I thought to myself: today is a good day, it would be quite a beautiful sight in Pasir Ris Park and it would be great to be cycling there! However, I have promised my mother to go back home straight after my CCA. Moreover, if I were to go back late, she will definitely be very worried.

讨论问题

1. 我们为何要遵守我们的承诺？

Discussion Question

1. Why do we have to keep our promises?

这么一想，我的心情轻松多了。我一点儿也不后悔没跟同学去公园其脚踏车。

I feel much better knowing that I have made the right decision and I did not have any regrets of not going with my friends to the park to cycle.

讨论问题

1. 我们可不可以不遵守我们所许下的承诺？
2. 在什么情况下我们可以不遵守我们的承诺？

Discussion Questions

1. Is it all right for us to break our promises?
2. In what situation/circumstances can we break our promises?

The following are questions originally from the text. We can see that students can actually get the answers straight from the text and thus students would not go beyond constructing meanings and understanding as they can just get the answers from the text. This would hinder them in developing their thinking abilities.

课本的问题

1. 如果你是志伟，你会跟同学去公园骑脚踏车吗？为什么？

2. 你要怎么做才不会让爸爸妈妈为你担心?

Question from the text

1. If you were Zhi Wei, would you go to cycle with your friends? Why?
2. What would you do so that you would not let your parents worry?

However, we can add in the following question for the students to discuss and answer. The question itself has no exact answer, and it allows students to explore the possible answers. The previous breakdown of the text with different sets of discussion questions was to help students to construct meanings to answer this last question.

Deep Thinking Question

(Open – Intellectual Question)

- 承诺是什么? 遵守承诺重要吗?
- What is a promise? Is it important to keep promises?

Discussion:

This study is still on going there are certain challenges in this study, and one of it is the students' language attitudes. As shown in Table 2, a majority of the students participating in this study felt that English Language is easier to learn, is more useful and is more meaningful as compare to Chinese Language. As such, one of the major limitations that this study faces with is the language attitudes towards learning of Chinese Language.

Students' Language Attitudes

Table 2: *illustrates the reactions of a group of Primary5 students' language attitudes*
N=78

Items	English	Chinese	Both
1. Which language do you think is easier to learn?	87.2%	7.7%	5.1%
2. Which language do you think is more useful to you?	71.8%	14.1	14.1%
3. Which language do you think is more meaningful?	50%	37.2%	12.8%

However, despite students' attitudes towards the learning of Chinese Language, observation from the videos and lesson have show positive results that given the right environment, students are able to engage in the holistic learning experience of Chinese Language.

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