

Exploring School-based Non-instructional and Semi-instructional Organised Activities in Students' Access to Instructional Curriculum

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Non- and/or semi-instructional organised activities such as field trips, school-based co-curricular activities and interschool competitions may be drawn upon as platforms for students to demonstrate the relevance of their understanding of theoretical knowledge in everyday life.
- More emphasis on lesson coherence can be undertaken by tapping into the use of metalanguage of the discipline in focus and the occasional uptake of non-standard English or Singlish to help students' access classroom instruction.
- A multidisciplinary approach conflating ideas from learning and literacies that emanate from cognitive, socio-cognitive and sociocultural perspectives may help identify affordances in learning contexts.

BACKGROUND

The research project was motivated by the state's focus on student-centric and values-driven education, and the interest in equipping students with broad and deep learning for

life (Ministry of Education [MOE] Work Plan Seminars, 2013 – 2014). While the discourse of theory and practice is commonly used to reveal aspects of cognitive and practical learning in education, the communicative element tends to be marginalized in schools. This project seeks to address the gap in textually mediated communication and social spaces within learning contexts. It attempts to uncover how students who are perceived as academically less inclined may be able to perform in environments that accommodate the richness of literacies and learning experiences of students.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The research project aims to investigate how learning contexts such as school-based non-instructional and semi-instructional organised activities (e.g., applied learning programme, field trips, interdisciplinary project work) can mediate and enhance students' participation in instructional education which commonly resides in classrooms. The research also identifies the conditions that connect learning between instructional curriculum and non- and semi-instructional organised activities in schools.

KEY FINDINGS

- Field trips can serve as an integrated platform for engaging students with multiple learning objectives, which can be academic or non-academic, or cognitively and non-cognitively related, involving both formal and informal contexts.
- Students tend to respond more actively to lessons that draw on inquiry-based learning and those that serve a social authentic purpose like participating in out-of-school field trips and in creating games for the betterment of social and mental life of others (e.g., helping dementia patients to recall).
- The pace of classroom interaction, specifically teacher initiation, learner response and teacher feedback sequence of interaction, tends to be faster in Normal (Academic and Technical) stream classes than in Express stream classes.
- Strategies employed to foster closer teacher–student classroom interactions are participatory between teacher and students, and are largely mediated by agents of informal discourse such as humour, non-standard English or Singlish, mini competitions, and non-scripted pretend play.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

The study contributes to the emerging trend of learning in school-based non-instructional or semi-instructional organised activities and how participation in such activities can serve multiple learning objectives. Drawing on ideas from learning and literacies, the study has advanced predominately from the sociocultural lens to identify affordances in learning contexts.

The study points to the critical role of teachers in creating the link for students to access academic/disciplinary knowledge that appears abstract, decontextualized and inaccessible. It highlights the importance of lesson coherence, primarily achieved through the use of metalanguage, metaphors and non-standard English, which are familiar to students.

The study posits greater connectedness and integration between academic and non-academic

curricula, and argues for more interdisciplinary courses to be valued at schools rather than at post-secondary levels (e.g., university) or workplaces, as it appears to be the case at present. A respectful balanced approach that attends to the diverse social and cultural resources of our students is needed.

The findings involving learning within instructional curriculum and non-instructional or semi-instructional organised activities could inspire and advance research in connected learning/curriculum that synergises work between learning and literacies in formal and informal contexts, in-school and out-of-school environments, and individual and collective spaces.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 180 participants from two schools took part in this research. Of these participants, 47 came from the pilot school. There were a total of 133 participants from the main study school where 32, 75 and 26 participants came from three different cases of organized activities—field work at Chinatown, field work at Singapore Botanic Gardens, and interdisciplinary project work known as Project Care respectively. The majority of student participants came from Normal stream, a learning track that is often associated with academically less inclined learners.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An ethnographic perspective to research and a case study approach, with concepts grounded in New Literacy Studies (NLS) and social learning, were used. The NLS approach offers a broader way of conceptualizing literacy by considering reading and writing as social practices rather than as mere skills. Lankshear and Knobel's (2011) notion of social learning was also drawn upon for investigating the study. Multiple research tools had also been used. These included participant observations, semi-structured interviews, observational field notes and photographs of artefacts to obtain phenomena that reflected students' participation in non-instructional and semi-instructional organised activities in schools.

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