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Research Article:

A Call to Integrate Visible Thinking Routines with a Reader Response Approach to Teaching Literature in English Language Education

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ABSTRACT

Thinking is greatly valued across many educational contexts and in Malaysia, the development of critical thinking, reasoning, creative thinking, and innovative thinking is strongly featured in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB). While there is a prominent focus on the development of thinking skills within the blueprint, thinking skills are rather weakly embedded in classroom practice, particularly in the teaching of literature in English. It is within this context that we call for the integration of Visible Thinking (VT) Routines through a reader response informed approach to the teaching of literature in English. We believe that utilising VT Routines can enhance critical engagement with literary texts and promote deep learning experiences for students. In this conceptual paper, we present how selected VT Routines can be used to support the development of two important dimensions of a reader response approach which are: (a) transacting with texts; and (b) developing criticality. We provide specific examples of how these routines can be used and illustrate what learning gains may be expected. By using VT Routines, English language teachers are provided with a systematic way to engage with a reader response approach to teaching literature in English. By using structures, routines, probing questions, and documentation, English language teachers can create opportunities for students to transact with texts and to develop criticality. Students' thinking is made more visible and this inadvertently leads to better thinking and learning experiences for students.

Keywords: Reader response, visible thinking routines, English language teaching, literature teaching, thinking skills

INTRODUCTION

It can be argued that learning is the outcome of thinking. Yet, how much thinking really takes place in classrooms? More than a decade ago, Ritchhart et al. (2011) observed that classrooms often function as spaces of "tell and practice"; teachers tell students what is important to know or do, and then students go on to practice those specific skills or knowledge. In these classrooms, little thinking happens because "retention of information through rote practice isn't learning; it is training" (Ritchhart et al., 2011, p. 29). While this might be the case, thinking is greatly valued across many educational systems, especially now, where there currently have been shifts to develop thinking through a focus on learning that is more dialogic, participatory, and critical.

Great emphasis on thinking is present globally, both at the school level, and also at higher education level. In universities, the prominent role of thinking skills is seen through graduate attributes which articulate the aims and goals of higher education. According to Hager and Holland (2006), graduate attributes are distinct from disciplinary or technical knowledge and often relate to thinking skills and effective communication. Qualities that are often referred to are critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, problem-solving, logical and independent thought, communication and information management skills (Bath et al., 2004). If students are expected to display such attributes at higher education level, the cultivation and development of these attributes and dispositions towards thinking should begin at school level, particularly at the secondary school level. It is unlikely that students will be able to engage in deep criticality at university level, if much of their schooling years were predominantly spent on rote learning and memorisation.

In the case of Malaysia, the development of thinking skills is of great importance and is seen featured in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), which is the national Malaysian educational policy. Part of the educational reforms that the MEB brought about was its move from mastery of content to more experiential, project-based learning activities that promote critical thinking. To illustrate, in this educational policy, one of the six aspirations for Malaysian students that are featured in the MEB is thinking skills:

> Every child will learn how to continue acquiring knowledge throughout their lives (instilling a love for inquiry and lifelong learning), to be able to connect different pieces of knowledge, and to create new knowledge. Every child will master a range of important cognitive skills, including critical thinking, reasoning, creative thinking, and innovation. This is an area where the system has historically fallen short, with students being less able than they should be in applying knowledge and thinking critically outside familiar academic contexts. (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. 10)

Within the context of English language teaching (ELT), which is the focus of this paper, emphasis on thinking is also seen. For example, the secondary school curriculum which is the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) or its Malay acronym, KSSM, has an explicit and obvious focus on higher order thinking skills (HOTS) within the curriculum, and teachers are expected to embed these skills in a systematic and structured manner. The SBELC defines HOTS as "the ability to apply knowledge, skills and values in reasoning, reflecting, problem-solving, decision-making, innovating, and creating" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017, p. 12).

The SBELC includes the teaching of English through literature which is one of the five main content standards in the syllabus. This is done through the Literature in Action (LiA) component which uses 'literary texts of different genres namely; poetry, dramas, short stories, graphics novels, and novels to inculcate reading habits and enhance thinking skills' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017, p. 9). LiA focuses on the learners' ability to enjoy and appreciate different literary works, to analyse and evaluate text, as well as to respond to texts creatively. The curriculum specifies that LiA is to be assessed through the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. By learning English through literature, students will able to appreciate the beauty of the English language and observe how language can be used diversely (Hashim & Abdul Talib, 2019). Furthermore, learning literature enables students to develop their sensitivity to how language is used for communicative purposes, and the adaptation of literature also empowers creative abilities.

Literary analysis plays an important role in a literature classroom, and Mart (2019) highlights six predominant approaches to literary analysis: new criticism, stylistic, critical literacy, language-based, structuralism, and reader response. Among these approaches, reader response was chosen as the focus of this paper due to its emphasis on the role of the reader in critically interrogating texts to draw various interpretations. Reader response acknowledges that individual experiences, emotions, and contexts significantly shape meaning. Unlike other literary analysis approaches that may prioritise authorial intent or textual features, reader response theory values personal engagement and encourages students to develop their interpretations, fostering a more dynamic and inclusive classroom environment. This approach not only enhances HOTS, which require students to be critical and reflective, but also empowers students to become active participants in their learning, making literature a personal experience.

Pedagogical strategies which can be used to guide students in the process of producing critical analyses of texts include the information-based approach, language-based approach, personal response approach, paraphrastic approach, moral-philosophical approach, and stylistic approach (Ab Rashid et al., 2010). Literary analysis, which involves a reader response, can be suitably aligned with a personal approach to teaching literature as this approach focuses on encouraging students to make connections between the themes in a text with their personal life experiences. Louise Rosenblatt

is regarded as one of the pioneers of the reader-response approach, and based on this approach, reading is regarded as a transactional process involving the reader and the text. Readers are positioned as experience builders who receive stimulus from the text which guides, regulates and provides a blueprint for interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1978). This approach to literature teaching has been shown to lead to emotional engagement with texts (Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013) and the development of criticality among students (Iskhak et al., 2020).

We believe that a reader response approach may be a suitable starting point for introducing literature in English language education in Malaysia, and in other countries where English is a second (or a foreign) language due to several problems that exist. First, over the years, studies on the teaching of literature in Malaysian secondary schools have shown that lessons have largely been teacher-centred with students playing a passive role (Ab Rashid et al., 2010). Focus has been largely on preparing students for examinations and previous studies have revealed that a prevailing belief among teachers is that teacher-centred approaches work better when dealing with students who have a low English language proficiency (Affendi & Aziz, 2020). In other words, the teaching of literature often follows a transmission model rather than a transactional model of education. This undermines the national aspiration of developing critical, creative and reflective thinkers. A reader response approach in contrast is an active, engaged pedagogical strategy that is student-focussed, however Sii and Chen (2016) found that this is an approach that teachers in their study tended to prefer least. The reason for this was because they believed that students were not capable of connecting with texts and providing their own opinions due to their low level of English proficiency.

Second, based on a review of literature on the teaching of literature in Malaysian schools, Hashim and Abdul Talib (2019) note that there are significant groups of students who perceive literature lessons as dull, boring and uninteresting. They attribute the lack of interest in literature learning to many factors, which include the examination-oriented culture, teachers' poor attitude and lack of motivation, and the selection of literary texts. With this in mind, we posit that a reader-response approach can prove to be a significant point of entry into learning literature because it connects the lives and experiences of the reader to the text. It promotes creativity, reflectivity, and criticality and goes beyond learning for the purpose of mastering language skills. Perhaps this can reignite and stimulate interest among students when learning literature.

Finally, we observe that in recent years, research on the teaching of literature in English language classrooms, specifically through the LiA component has been on the decline. One possible reason for this is because while the teaching of literature features in the SBELC as LiA, it is currently not assessed in national examinations, and thus Malaysian teachers and students focus less on literature in English and instead emphasise on examination-bound subjects. However, this does not render the learning of literature insignificant as we believe it plays a vital role in fulfilling the aspirations of

the MEB in nurturing cognitive skills, critical thinking, reasoning, creative thinking, and innovation among students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

These three abovementioned problems have made us interested in exploring the various possibilities for literature teaching. In this article, we specifically focus on the incorporation of a thinking tool called VT Routines which can be used to teach literature using a reader response informed approach. VT Routines have been used to promote student learning in various educational settings. Tishman and Palmer (2005, p. 1) define VT Routines as "any kind of observable representation that documents and supports the development of an individual's or group's ongoing thoughts, questions, reasons, and reflections". They add that these representations can be in the form of mind maps, charts, and lists, diagrams, and worksheets; they are only regarded as visible thinking if they make students' thinking visible. Teachers who seek to make thinking visible require a systematic, organising structure, and this can be done using VT Routines, which can loosely guide students through various thought processes.

We call for these routines to be considered as an option for those may want to utilise a reader response approach within an ELT context because these routines have been observed to develop cognitive awareness and language development among learners. We believe that utilising VT Routines through a reader response approach to teaching literature can enhance critical engagement with literary texts and promote deep learning experiences. With this in mind, the question that drives the discussion in this conceptual paper is:

> How can VT Routines be integrated in a reader response informed literature classroom?

LITERATURE REVIEW

VT Routines in Teaching and Learning

Thinking, which is an invisible process can be made visible through questioning, listening to students' responses, and through tools such as VT Routines (Gholam, 2019). VT Routines can be seen as mini-strategies that teachers can repeatedly use in the classroom, with each routine targeting a different kind of thinking. These tools are referred to as routines because they represent a sequence of actions which are aimed at efficiently achieving a specific outcome (Ritchhart, 2015).

In classroom practice, teachers integrate VT Routines with their own content in order to develop a culture of thinking and thinking dispositions among students. Thinking routines can be incorporated into the teaching of any subject or language skill as it

encourages students to think critically and to connect ideas to their immediate realities. It is a flexible and systematic research-based approach to integrating the development of students' thinking with content learning across different subjects and educational levels (Pinedo et al., 2018).

VT Routines encourage students to actively engage in the learning process and to move beyond memorising facts; it encourages students to connect new knowledge with what is already known (Ritchhart et al., 2011). Salmon (2008, p. 129) highlights that VT Routines are successful in developing thinking because each routine:

Is goal oriented in that it targets specific types of thinking:

1. Gets used over and over again in the classroom;

2. Consists of only a few steps;

3. Is easy to learn and teach;

4. Is easy to support when students are engaged in the routine;

5. Can be used across a variety of contexts; and

6. Can be used by the group or by the individual

Project Zero, a research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education developed these VT Routines, which they have organised in the Thinking Routine Toolbox. These thinking tools have been designed with a set of questions and brief sequences of steps to support student thinking when seeking to explore ideas. The VT Routines in the Toolbox explore the following areas:

1. Perspectives, Controversies & Dilemmas

2. Objects & Systems

3. Perspective Taking

4. Digging Deeper into Ideas

5. Synthesising and Organising Ideas

6. Introducing and Exploring Ideas

7. Global Thinking

The aim of these VT tools is to help teachers cultivate thinking dispositions in students. Thinking routines are seen not just as mere class activities, but instead as vehicles to explore content. Ritchhart et al. (2011) explain that through these routines, students are given the opportunity to mentally engage with the content through offering their

ideas, explanations, justifications, interpretations, reasons, evidence, perspectives, alternatives, and questions. When this happens, students find more meaning in the subject of study and more meaningful connections between school and everyday life.

VT Routines have been used in a range of subjects which include business studies (Sepulveda Larraguibel & Venegas-Muggli, 2019); Mathematics (Ritchhart, 2015) and even in English language (Dajani, 2016). Studies have included students ranging from young learners to those at tertiary level (see Salmon, 2008; Sepulveda Larraguibel & Venegas-Muggli, 2019; Wolberg & Goff, 2012). While there have been numerous studies focussing on VT Routines in the context of English language teaching, introspections into this area remain limited, especially in its implementation in the Malaysian context. At present, studies on VT in English language education relate to the teaching of reading (Phonekeo, 2020), general English (Dajani, 2016) , academic writing (Hooper, 2015) and English as a Foreign Language (Lei & Joseph Jeyaraj, 2023). The focus areas of the abovementioned studies indicate that there seems to be minimal exploration into how VT Routines can be integrated into the teaching of literature in English.

A Reader Response Approach to Reading Literary Texts

Over three decades ago, Elliot (1990) noted that the traditional method of teaching literature as a body of received knowledge to be learnt through lectures had begun to be criticised as being too product-centred, because it had a tendency of imposing meaning of texts on students. The work of Louise Rosenblatt (1978) instead puts forward an alternate way of reading literature, which recognises reading as a transactional process, which involves students interpreting and making meaning as they read. Rosenblatt's notion of reading, which is grounded on a cognitive-constructivist view of learning opposes the transmission approach to reading. Instead, contextual orientation becomes the focal point for readers who may take a sociological, historical, or anthropological stance (Scott, 1994). Hence, Rosenblatt's approach is regarded as a transactional process and can be conceptualised as a "reader-plus-text-oriented" approach (Lewis, 2000).

Through a reader response approach, readers interpret literature and link it to their personal experiences. Based on Rosenblatt's transactional view, readers are experience builders and the text serves as a stimulus which guides, regulates and provides a blueprint for interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1978). In other words, personal experiences regulate what should be brought to the forefront of reader's attention. In the process, students are engaged in a thoughtful process of interpreting texts. Hence, a reader-response classroom is one that is student-focussed, reflective, creative, and critical because students are encouraged to think for themselves and to arrive at their own unique interpretations. A systematic literature review by Kunjanman and Aziz (2021) revealed various studies which have explored the use of a reader response approach

in the teaching of literature. Findings from these studies showed that students were able to shift from merely reporting facts to being able to provide personal accounts of their emotional engagement with texts read (Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013); students developed criticality when reading (Iskhak et al., 2020); small group discussions enabled students with low reading interest to feel their opinions and experiences were valued (Utami et al., 2014); and there was student participation, awareness and responsiveness in lessons (Spirovska, 2019).

A reader-response approach can be useful within the Malaysian secondary school context because of certain aims of the LiA component. While not explicitly stated within the LiA component of the SBELC, it may be inferred that a reader response approach to teaching literature may suitably align with fulfilling its curricular aims. For instance, Content Standards 5.1 of the SBELC states that through LiA, students need to "Engage with, respond to and interpret a variety of literary text types". For Content Standard 5.1, the focus is to " Give a personal response to a variety of literary text types" and "Interpret a variety of literary text types" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017, p. 39). To meet this standard within the curriculum, teachers may want to consider the reader response approach as it has the potential to engage students in an active process of meaning-making and responding to literary texts.

While the reader response approach seems to suitably coincide with curricular aims, a systematic review by Affendi and Aziz (2020) which covered preferred literature teaching approaches by Malaysian teachers noted that other approaches such as the information-based approach, moral-philosophical approach and paraphrastic approach were generally preferred. However, these approaches are often more traditional, utilise more teacher-centered methods, and limit students' opportunities to engage actively with the literature. There seems to be only one study by Suliman et al. (2019)the teaching of literature may not succeed if unsuitable approaches are employed. Therefore, it requires suitable activities to be conducted in a lesson which this study aims to examine. By employing questionnaire and interviews as the research instruments, 271 English as Second Language (ESL which reveals that teachers favoured approaches that enables students to make connections between literary texts and their personal life. Nevertheless, Affendi and Aziz (2020) urge for approaches which enable a personal response to be implemented more frequently because it provides opportunities to foster critical thinking and personal connection with the texts, allowing students to be less passive and more expressive in learning.

Here, we see the relevance of integrating VT Routines in the teaching of literature in Malaysian schools using a reader response approach because it can promote freedom, enjoyment, and critical and personal engagement with texts. VT Routines support the development of a culture of thinking, which is important when students need to contemplate and interpret texts they read. At the same time, VT Routines make these contemplative moments visible to students, teachers and peers. Often, thinking

is seen as solely a cognitive activity, yet thinking should also address emotional and motivational dimensions (Ritchhart et al., 2009). As an approach that emphasises student-driven and higher-level reasoning (Kunjanman & Aziz, 2021), reader response can benefit from drawing on VT Routines to fulfil its aims of making the learning of literature one that is active, meaningful, and transactional.

INTERGRATING VT ROUTINES IN A READER RESPONSE APPROACH TO TEACHING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

In this section we explore two dimensions of a reader response approach and discuss selected VT Routines that support the development of these dimensions. These dimensions are:

1. Transacting with texts

2. Developing criticality

Transacting with Texts

Reader response rejects a transmission view of education, which presupposes that meaning is only generated by the text, and can only be uncovered by improved analytical skills (Mart, 2019). Freire (2005) describes the transmission model as a 'banking' model of education. This is because within this model, students function as open repositories to be deposited with knowledge by teachers. Such an approach to education silences and marginalises students' voice and experience (Couch, 2017).

However, through the reader response approach reading is seen as a transactional process (as opposed to a transmission process), where readers use their own schemata and (past) life experiences to interpret texts. Through this process, teachers do not merely transfer knowledge to students, but instead play the role of facilitators and mediators in socially constructed learning activities (Iskhak et al., 2017). As facilitators they guide students towards their own discovery of meaning (Elliot, 1990). Because each student has differing lived experiences, each interpretation can offer a unique perspective to the text. The process of transacting also positions students as legitimate meaning makers, instead of consumers of knowledge. Reader response pedagogy opposes passivity because it places students as members of a democratic classroom community which is actively engaged in critical reading-writing events (Iskhak et al., 2020).

When teachers encourage students to actively transact with texts, English language learning becomes a dynamic and interactive process, allowing students to grow as more proficient and confident language users. Previous research highlights how such an approach transforms learning into an active process, enabling students to engage deeply

with both content and their peers. For example, Sepulveda Larraguibel and Venegas-Muggli (2019) found that students taught using VT Routines outperformed those taught through traditional, teacher-centred, lecture-based methods. They attributed this improved academic performance to the development of thinking dispositions fostered by VT Routines, which "became automated and used to approach class content and exams even when routines were not used" (p. 414). In a similar vein, Ramos-Vallecillo et al. (2024) demonstrated that the active learning opportunities promoted by these thinking routines supported meaningful learning construction and enhanced collaboration among students. Building on this evidence, we suggest that VT Routines can empower students to transact effectively with literary texts. To illustrate this, we will provide a few examples, drawing on three selected VT Routines outlined in Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox (see Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2016).

What makes you say that?

When seeking to provide a personal response to texts, students may struggle to provide evidence-based reasoning. This routine encourages students to provide justifications for their interpretations. The two core questions which drive this question are (i) What do you know? and (ii) What do you see or know that makes you say that? For instance, when responding to a poem, the teacher could ask students what they know so far from reading the poem and then go on to probe for reasons on how students have arrived at those observations. Or when analysing character, teachers can ask students how they see the character being portrayed or what they know about this character after reading the text. Following this, justifications can be sought by asking students "What do you see or know from the text that makes you say that".

Some options for making students responses visible is by making a chart or keeping an ongoing list of explanations posted in the classroom. As interpretations develop and evolve, the teacher can note changes and have further discussions about these new explanations.

The 4Cs

Beginner readers may struggle when structuring their responses to literary texts, be it through written or spoken form. The 4Cs provides an organised way of structuring text-based discussions which is built around making connections, asking questions, identifying key ideas, and considering application. The 4Cs revolve around these questions:

> Connections: What connections do you draw between the text and your own life or your other learning?

Challenge: What ideas, positions, or assumptions do you want to challenge or argue with in the text?

Concepts: What key concepts or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to from the text?

Changes: What changes in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the text, either for you or others?

When utilising the 4Cs, teachers can choose to focus on all 4Cs or even just one or two, depending on the text that has been chosen for analysis. When conducting the 4Cs within a small group, students can be first given time to identify or underline parts of the text that relate to the "C" under discussion. Then a group discussion can ensue, with each person sharing their "C" in relation to the text read. They can read the section identified and move on to explain why they have chosen to focus on this particular section of the text. Other group members may add their comments on the offered text as well, and after everyone within the group has shared their thoughts, they can move on to the next "C".

The 4Cs transform reading into a dialogic process, where students actively engage with texts by making connections and asking questions, rather than passively consuming them. Opportunities for socio-emotional development are also offered. Xu (2024) conducted a study demonstrating that dialogic reading which utilised self-made picture books combined with the use of VT Routines significantly enhanced children's performance in key areas of emotional intelligence, including recognition, expression, regulation, and empathy. These 4Cs align suitably with a reader response approach because they allow students to transact with texts read by enabling them to make connections, and then go on to challenge ideas and positions within the text. In such a transactional process, students do not become passive recipients of knowledge and there is a reciprocal bond between the reader and the text (Mart, 2019).

Word-Phrase-Sentence

In literary analysis, students are often required to identify the theme in a given text. Word-Phrase- Sentence is a routine which can provide a scaffold in guiding students to do this. The routine is structured in the following manner:

1. Individually, review a text and then select a:

• Word that captured your attention or struck you as powerful.

• Phrase that moved, engaged, or provoked you.

• Sentence that was meaningful to you, that you felt captures the core idea of the text.

2. As a group, discuss and record your choices. Begin by sharing your words, then phrases, then sentences. Explain why you made the selections you did. Looking at your group's collective choices of words, phrases, and sentences, reflect on the conversation by identifying:

• What themes emerge?

• What implications or predictions can be drawn?

• Were there aspects of the text not captured in your choices?

This routine helps students engage with and make meaning from a chosen text with a particular focus on capturing the essence of the text or what speaks to them. By individually having to identify a "sentence" from the text, students' attention start becoming focussed on the main idea of the text. The second stage in this routine, which is the group discussion stage allow for students to compile their ideas and then observe if any themes or trends emerge. This routine scaffolds the task of getting students to identify the theme in a given text.

Developing Criticality

A reader response approach allows students to think critically about texts and supports the process of developing engaged, thoughtful, and critical readers. Using a reader response approach helps secondary students become critical readers because students are not simply told what to think and how to think. Instead, students are required to justify their interpretations with textual evidence, and are challenged to provide explanations of which aspects of the text guided them to derive their personal responses (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017).

When thinking about the term "criticality", in relation to reading and writing, it is often used in the context of critical literacy which refers to the capacity to (re) read and (re)write texts against dominant discourses (Mendelowitz, 2017). When this happens, students give voice to their experiences within oppressive social systems (Freire, 2005). Mendelowitz (2017) explains that critical literacy has a strong social justice agenda, aiming to teach learners to read and write "against the grain"; however, to date, there has been limited uptake of attempts to situate critical literacy in relation to imagination and creativity. Selected VT Routines can be used to enhance students' creative imagination and develop criticality. Phonekeo and Macalister (2021) found that the use of VT Routines impacted critical reading in numerous ways, namely through enhancing interpretation and meaning-making skills while at the same time

fostering social interactions. Even at the primary school level the use of VT Routines have revealed how critical thinking improved, and in the process enabled students to think about and question their own understandings (Manurung et al., 2022). Some examples of VT Routines which develop thinking competence include *Step Inside*, *See-Think-Me-We*, and *Compass Points*.

As previously mentioned, in Malaysia, there is a focus on the development of (critical) thinking as espoused by the MEB and SBELC. Yet classroom realities may provide a different picture of the extent to which critical abilities are honed. Abdul Aziz @Ahmad et al. (2017) revealed that there was a lack of emphasis on HOTS in the classroom, and that teachers reported that they were unsure how to plan, implement and assess HOTS. Although it is generally expected that students would have developed a certain level of critical reading abilities by the time they enter university because of emphasis on thinking skills at secondary level, this has not always been the case. A small scale study among Malaysian tertiary students revealed that students had yet to fully develop critical reading abilities, and that when reading opinion-based texts, they would not adopt a questioning stance (Kaur, 2013). This lack of critical engagement could, in part, be attributed to the "copy-and-paste" culture prevalent among Malaysian students. This culture stems from an exam-driven educational system that prioritises obtaining the "right" answer over encouraging original, critical, and creative responses (Puteh-Behak et al., 2015).

VT Routines have been shown to offer potential in addressing these challenges by guiding and scaffolding students' critical thinking processes. Dass et al. (2021) demonstrated that VT Routines had positive effects on Malaysian students' learning. These routines created opportunities for students to construct new knowledge, ask meaningful questions, and share ideas confidently - all of which foster critical engagement. To illustrate the role of VT Routines in developing criticality, the following three routines will be explained.

Values, Identities, Actions

This routine can serve as a post-reading task for students after they have completed reading a particular text. Through this routine, students are provided with opportunities to move beyond the text and to consider the text through a civic lens. The routine begins with asking students to consider the work that they have read, and then contemplating on the following questions:

> 1. What values does this work invite us to think about? E.g., fairness, justice, safety, etc.

> * Dig deeper by asking students these follow-up questions:

Are they your values? The values of others?

Does the work affirm or challenge, or raise puzzles about these values?

2. Who is this work speaking about? And who is this work trying to speak to? (They do not necessarily need to be the same people)

* Dig deeper by asking students these follow-up questions:

Is anyone left out of the story that should be in it?

Do you fit in, or not so much in this story? Why?

3. What actions might this work encourage?

* Dig deeper by asking students these follow-up questions:

Whose actions? Yours? Others? Why?

The Values, Identities, and Actions routine is rich with opportunity for students to question the text and then uncover hidden values and assumptions that are being represented within a literary text. A critical dimension is seen through Question 2 which guides students to contemplate on whose voices may be silenced, and whether they can envision themselves being represented in the text. Question 3 guides students to contemplate on a social action dimension that may ensue as a result of reading the text. Having students to reflect on this could actually be an initial step for the development of Freire's notion of praxis in critical literacy : "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2005, p. 51)

See, Think, Me, We

This routine enables students to connect the literary work they are reading with larger issues around them. Although this routine may be more commonly used with pictures or images, it can be adapted to suit the study of literature as well. The routine begins in the following manner:

1. SEE: Look closely at the work. What do you notice? Make lots of observations.

2. THINK: What thoughts do you have about the work?

3. ME: What connections can you make between you and the work?

4. WE: How might the work be connected to bigger stories— about the world and our place in it?

When using this routine in a literature classroom, teachers can adapt two aspects of this routine. First, the "SEE" aspect could be related to what students "see" happening in the text. Second, teachers can choose to implemented in two parts. SEE and THINK could be dealt with at the while-reading stage of a lesson, while the ME and WE could be brought in at the end at the post-reading stage.

The SEE step encourages students to examine the text closely and to describe what they can see happening in the text. In this stage, students are only required to provide descriptions of their observations and to hold off making any interpretations and opinions. It is only at the THINK step that teacher can encourage students to share their thoughts, opinions and interpretations about the work. The ME step calls on students to make personal connections with what was read, therefore nurturing a safe, trusting atmosphere is essential. This is especially important if dealing critically with content that touches on controversial issues or topics (Joseph Jeyaraj & Wald, 2020). Therefore, teachers need to build a trusting classroom environment so that students will feel safe sharing their personal thoughts about a text. The final step to this routine is the WE step. In this step, students are asked to look at the bigger picture and make connections beyond themselves, involving larger themes and human experiences. This step can be challenging for students so similar to the ME step, teachers can make the first move to share their own reflections with students.

3-2-1 Bridge

Through the 3-2-1 Bridge Routine, students can understand their own process of learning by considering their conceptions before and after reading a literary text. This routine might work well as a pre-reading and finally a post-reading task for students.
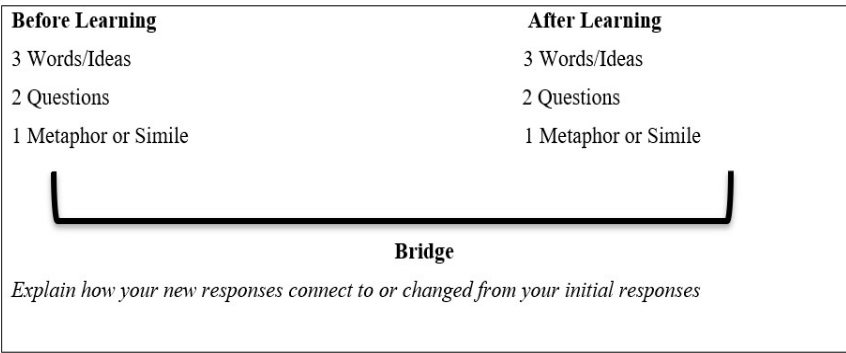
Before Learning	After Learning
3 Words/Ideas	3 Words/Ideas
2 Questions	2 Questions
1 Metaphor or Simile	1 Metaphor or Simile

Bridge
Explain how your new responses connect to or changed from your initial responses

Figure 1. 3-2-1 Bridge Routine (Source: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/3-2-1-bridge)

The first step involves introducing students to the text. Perhaps at this point teachers could share a few details about the text with students or even ask a few questions to activate their prior knowledge. This will give both teacher and students to get a glimpse into their initial ideas about the text. Students can then be asked to list 3 words or thoughts, 2 questions, and 1 metaphor or simile about the text. After this is done, teachers can move on to the while-reading stage of the lesson and provide students with activities and tasks which explore the text in greater detail. It is important that the tasks within the while-reading stage introduce new information or perspectives about the literary text that extends students' thinking in new directions.

Once students have been provided with different tasks to engage with the text in the while-reading stage of the lesson, students can be asked to complete the "After Learning" part of the routine where they go on to list again 3 words or thoughts, 2 questions, and 1 metaphor or simile about the text. The significant step within this routine is the "Bridge" where students make connections between their initial and new thinking, explaining how and why their thinking shifted.

Through this routine, students' thoughts are documented and they get to visibly see how their thinking has changed over time. The "Bridge" step allows for critical reflection on learning, which at times does not receive much attention in classrooms, especially in circumstances where a transmission model of teaching dominate.

CONCLUSION

In this article, a reader response approach to teaching literature which integrates the use of VT Routines has been presented. A reader response approach enables students to be active agents of meaning making and VT Routines help support this process of meaning making. These routines are flexible and can be adapted to different contexts and they provide opportunities for deep engagement with texts.

As related through the examples above, VT Routines can be used to nurture the creative imaginations of students through a process of critical contemplation. Engaging with criticality is not just something that should be reserved for students at higher education level, but it should begin in secondary school as well. As planned in the MEB, both school-based and national examinations will shift its focus from testing knowledge to testing HOTS. The transformational impact that is expected to be seen is richer school experiences of students which involve project and group-based work, and community projects, all of which support the development of higher order thinking skills (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, English language teachers who want to fulfil the aspirations of the MEB through the SBELC, which specifically contains a literature component – LiA, can use various pedagogical approaches and tools which can enable deeper engagement with thinking. One suitable approach, especially in relation to the

teaching of literature is a reader response approach, and based on the discussion so far, it has been illustrated how VT Routines can be a useful tool in facilitating two important aspects of a reader response approach, which are transacting with the text and in the process developing criticality.

The integration of VT Routines with a reader response approach can be especially helpful to beginner readers who may not have a clear structure or framework when analysing works of literature. As illustrated through the selected examples of routines, these tools provide powerful, probing questions for students to contemplate upon and discuss. Opportunities for critical engagement happens because by using these routines, students do not just passively accept what is read, but instead are guided to critically interrogate ideas, values, and the intention of the text. Hence, through the various protocols within each routine, students' knowledge are scaffolded through a process of learning and thinking (Ritchhart, 2015).

VT Routines are not just important for students, but they can benefit teachers as well. Novice teachers are provided with a systematic and organised way of facilitating thinking in literature classes. Novice teachers can sometime struggle playing a facilitative role in the classroom and be unsure of suitable questioning techniques which stimulate dialogue and critical discussion. Through VT Routines, novice English language teachers are provided with a systematic way they can follow when engaging with a reader response approach to teaching literature.

Only when thinking is made visible, can teachers begin to understand both what and how their students are learning. By using structures, routines, probing questions, and documentation, English language teachers can strive to make thinking more visible, which can inadvertently impact better thinking and learning experiences for students.

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