

Paragraph Composition Via ‘Carousel with A Destination’: A CSR Project with Year 5 Students

Pembangunan Penulisan Melalui ‘Carousel with A Destination’: Satu Projek Tanggungjawab Sosial Korporat Bersama Murid Tahun 5

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Abstract: Writing is a skill that amalgamates various knowledge like vocabulary, sentence structure, spelling, and grammar. ‘Carousel with a Destination’ (CwaD) is a concept that provides the students with the required knowledge which is to be pieced together in writing. Carousel refers to the stations arranged in a circle and each station offers different activities which are related to the chosen topic and skills for writing. This paper highlights CwaD - the project and more importantly, it discusses the concept of effective fun learning. Thus, to show its effectiveness, the paper puts forth a study as proof of the success of CwaD. This study utilised a simple and direct pencil-paper questionnaire. The respondents were 56 year five students who participated in the project. There are three findings that can be shared. Firstly, the students really enjoyed participating in the project. Secondly, the writing they produced was good as they used the vocabulary, the paragraph structure and correct grammar which they just learnt at the carousel stations. Thirdly, the words they chose to express themselves in the open-ended part of the questionnaire reflect the elements that they like about CwaD – either regarding the activities, the teachers or the ‘learning’ itself. All the words are positively-connotated. CwaD is sustainable in terms of scalability where it can be conducted for any subject and for any number of students. It is beneficial as an introduction or as a recapitulation of any topic.

Keywords: English, fun learning, writing

Abstrak: Penulisan merupakan satu kemahiran yang mengumpulkan pelbagai disiplin ilmu seperti perbendaharaan kata, struktur ayat, ejaan dan juga nahu. ‘Carousel with a Destination’ (CwaD) adalah merupakan satu konsep yang menggabungkan semua ilmu yang terlibat bagi menghasilkan sesuatu penulisan. ‘Carousel’ merujuk kepada stesen yang disusun di dalam bulatan yang mana setiap stesen tersebut menyediakan aktiviti yang sesuai untuk topik yang telah dipilih bagi kemahiran menulis. Artikel ini mengetengahkan projek CwaD dan yang lebih pentingnya adalah konsep pembelajaran yang menyeronokkan dan berkesan. Maka, bagi menunjukkan bahawa CwaD ini berkesan, artikel ini membincangkan satu penyelidikan yang telah dijalankan semasa projek itu dikendalikan. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan soalselidik yang ringkas. Terdapat 56 responden yang semuanya murid tahun lima yang menyertai CwaD. Terdapat tiga dapatan yang boleh dikongsikan. Pertama, murid-murid sangat gembira dengan projek ini. Kedua, penulisan yang dibuat di akhir projek adalah baik kerana mereka telah menggunakan perbendaharaan kata, struktur perenggan dan nahu yang betul yang telah mereka pelajari di stesen ‘carousel’. Ketiga, perkataan yang mereka kongsikan menunjukkan elemen CwaD – sama ada mengenai aktiviti, guru atau ‘pembelajaran’ itu sendiri. Semua perkataan itu

mempunyai konotasi yang positif. CwaD adalah bersifat lestari kerana ia mempunyai 'scalability' di mana ia boleh digunakan untuk apa-apa subjek dan juga kepada bilangan pelajar yang pelbagai. Ia berguna sebagai pengenalan atau rumusan sesuatu topik.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggeris, pembelajaran yang menyeronokkan, penulisan

Introduction

Among the many skills one learns in the effort to excel in English, writing can be deemed as one of the most difficult. Previous research and studies highlighted this supposition (Chokwe, 2013; Cole & Feng, 2015; Fareed & Bilal, 2016). Writing is complex because it amalgamates various knowledge like vocabulary, sentence structure, spelling, and grammar, just to name a few. In fact, Nunan (1989) - the key personnel for second language learning, propounds that writing involves complicated cognitive activities as the learner needs to conflate many aspects to produce a paragraph, what more a full-blown essay. More recent studies also echo this (Kellog, 2001; Durga & Rao, 2018). Thus, it can be surmised that throughout the decades, even after new and more effective methods have been utilised, writing remains a mystery. In order to demystify writing, there is a need to unpack the elements that are needed to compose a good piece of writing. Thus, the introduction of the concept of Carousel with a Destination or CwaD. This paper shares the concept of CwaD and how does this fit into writing based on a programme conducted for year five (5) students at a school. Hence, this requires an introduction to CwaD and it is followed by a literature review looking into the areas underpinning CwaD before it ends with the delineation of the study.

Carousel with a Destination (CwaD)

CwaD began as a concept of putting things together with a purpose to ensure that the end is achieved. This is contradictory to the actual carousels found in theme parks where each alternate horse moves up and down in synchrony on its axle, but they are actually not going anywhere. Although all the horses seem to be moving, they have no destination, when the carousel stops, the horses also stop and it is usually at the same location. Hence CwaD embraces the movement of each of the horses as it portrays dynamic activity but it amends the lack of direction by setting a destination for the carousel. Mapping this analogy unto learning writing, the horses are

the activity stations, while the destination is completing a paragraph.

CwaD dissects writing and proposes that the elements should be presented separately to the learners. However, looking at CwaD from another angle, it can be said that CwaD puts together the elements to make writing. Either way, CwaD offers a compilation of activities that are related and relevant in completing a set objective. Each station provides an activity that is closely related to the element needed to complete a paragraph. The researchers, who are also practicing English teachers and lecturers have identified seven (7) elements important and relevant for the writing of a paragraph on 'Picnic'. The elements are as follows:

1. Vocabulary
2. Sentence structure and paragraph structure
3. Adjectives
4. Preposition
5. Spelling
6. Linkers
7. Grammar – subject-verb-agreement and past tense.

These elements are the base for the activities conducted at each station respectively. Students were divided into seven (7) big groups and each was assigned to a station in Round 1. In other words, each group began at a different station. The stations are arranged in a circle as seen in Figure 1. For example, Group A would start at Station One (1) while Group E would go to Station Five (5) in the first round. Each round would be for 15 minutes; in other words, each group spent 15 minutes at one station. When the whistle was blown, it signified the next round. Thus, in round two (2), Group A would move to Station Two (2) while Group E to Station Six (6). Figure 1 shows the movement of the groups based on the arrows. With seven (7) groups and seven (7) stations, there were seven (7) rounds. They went around as a group to individual station to learn about each of the elements by completing the activities provided by the team members who manned the station. At the end of the seventh round, all groups would have gone through all the stations and they could gather in the middle of the hall to apply collaboratively what they have learnt at each station by writing a paragraph on 'A Picnic'.

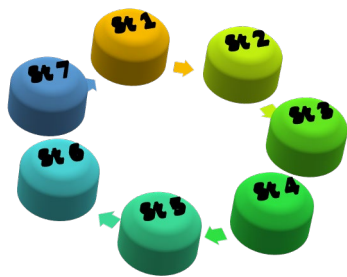


Figure 1 The Stations in a Circle

Figure 1 illuminates the location of the seven (7) stations and how the group moves from one station to the other. Figure 1 resembles the carousel and the stations are the horses. After seven (7) rounds, all of the groups would sit together in the middle of the circle and they were given a mahjong paper to write the paragraph. That would be the set destination. The next section discusses the theories and models that are the cornerstone of the CwaD concept.

Literature review

This section focuses on the conceptual framework that gives life to CwaD. Thus, it begins with the discussion on the elements in the framework and it continues with how each element works in CwaD. ‘Carousel with a Destination’ is a concept that merges together three (3) areas into a conceptual framework. They are gamification, perceptual learning styles and affective filter. Figure 2 displays the conceptual framework.

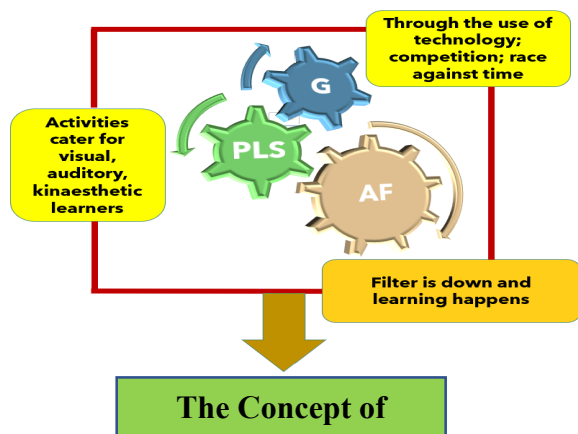


Figure 2 The Conceptual Framework for CwaD

It can be seen in Figure 2 that the three (3) areas or concepts work together where the related tenets from each area are seen in the implementation of CwaD. Firstly, gamification is defined as “application of game mechanisms in non-gaming environments” (Caponetto,

Earp & Ott, 2104, p.1). There are two (2) key phrases that require further discussion. They are ‘game mechanisms’ and ‘non-gaming environments’. The former refers to the properties of games like competition and collaboration (Deterding, 2013), race against time (Kapp, 2012), and also maybe reward. On the other hand, the latter points to situations which are not game-related. Therefore, they can be events in offices, schools, and activities in own homes too. Putting the two key phrases together has brought about a novel situation. For instance, teaching and learning activities include elements of game, it can be as simple as raising your hand quickly if you want to answer the question. For CwaD, the event is learning and more specifically it is about writing a paragraph while the game elements include collaboration as it is group work (seven groups), race against time (as each group has only 15 minutes to complete all the activities at each station) and also reward (each group gets points from some of the activities and the group that has the highest accumulated point gets a hamper).

Furthermore, gamification is rather synonymous with gadgets and technology. Smartphones and computers are used for the activities in CwaD. As an illustration, for Station 1, vocabulary on picnic is introduced via a song on video which the students listen to and watch on the smartphone. The song on video is accessed via augmented reality where the students need to scan a given picture using the phone to find the right trigger that allows the video to pop up on the phone screen and they are able to watch and listen to the audio.

The second area is perceptual learning styles. According to Reid (1987), these learning styles involve our very own senses which are eyes, ears, hands, and body movement. These modalities are called visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic, respectively. Most of the activities at each station are prepared based on these styles; either on its own or combined. For instance, for Station 6, linkers are introduced in an actual process of sandwich making. Students are asked to follow the instructions to make a sandwich and say out the process with the focus on the use of sequence connectors. They are then to complete a handout on linkers which are to be utilised in the paragraph writing on picnic.

Affective filter is one of the five (5) hypotheses listed by Krashen to be important in the second language learning procedure. Its concept is rather simple and straight forward where when the filter is down, the input is in. Du (2009) also points out that “Krashen argued that people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in” (p. 163). Thus, the filters can be low when the activities prepared appeal to the learners. This idea is further explained by Wang (2020). He penned in the discussion on applying the concept of affective filter, “to apply affective filter means to apply

activities to enhance students' internal learning motivation, adopt team work to build up students' confidence and creating a relaxed atmosphere to reduce anxiety, to decrease affective filter function and improve students' learning enthusiasm” (p. 984). In relation to CwaD, it can be said that the activities which embrace the tenets of gamification and perceptual learning styles are fun and appealing.

Furthermore, addressing the fact that these students are digital natives, three (3) of the stations utilised the gadgets. Stations 1 and 3 require them to use the smartphone to do augmented reality on vocabulary and adjectives, respectively. Station 5 provides a laptop and a tab for them to do spelling activities. Hence, these activities should be able to bring down the students’ filter and allow for learning to happen. Furthermore, by ensuring that each station provides activities focusing on the right skill and knowledge in the writing task, students would be equipped with sufficient information and ability to tackle the endeavour and produce a good paragraph on picnic. Table 1 below summarises the activities conducted and the underpinning areas or concepts.

Table 1 Summary of Activities

Station	Item	Description	Focus & Skills	Areas/Concepts
1	Vocabulary	Scan the picture using handphone to find the trigger which pops the video. Listen and watch to identify related words for picnic and find them in the wordsearch.	Augmented Reality, Listening.	Gamification, Perceptual Learning Styles (Auditory)
2	Structure	Sentence – rearrange the cut phrases to make simple and compound sentences (paste) Paragraph – rearrange the sentences to make a well-developed paragraph.	Sentence and paragraph structure.	Perceptual Learning Styles (Tactile/ Kinesthetic)
3	Adjectives	Scan the picture using handphone to check the colour of the items. Colour the items. Underline suitable adjective based on the picture.	Using the right adjectives.	Gamification – use of gadget. Perceptual Learning Styles (Visual)

4	Prepositions	Based on the description, the group builds the scene on the beach. The description focuses on the location of the items – a lot of prepositions. They use plasticine to build the scene.	To place the items correctly according to the description given.	Perceptual Learning Styles (Tactile/ Kinesthetic)
5	Spelling	Word-building on the laptop and spelling-it-right on the tab.	Both activities require them to be more aware about spelling.	Gamification
6	Linkers	Step by step sandwich preparation. Say out the sequence connectors when preparing the sandwich. Complete a handout focusing on the use of linkers.	Using sequence connectors and other related linkers.	Perceptual learning styles (Tactile/ Kinesthetic)
7	Grammar	Filling in the blanks (past tense) and error identification (grammatical items)	To report past event at the picnic.	Gamification (competition among members)

Table 1 details out the activities and the focus of each station. The last column shows that all of the stations include both or either gamification or perceptual learning styles. It can be deduced that these activities focus on the students’ variety of preferences and extrinsic motivation on completing the work within time and getting the highest marks. In other words, the focus has been deviated from just listening and absorbing to playing and doing things they like. With the latter, the students would feel at ease and thus they lower their affective filter and subconsciously, they absorb, understand and learn the lesson. This can be seen in the paragraph writing completed at the end of the programme.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to investigate the students’ acceptance of CwaD. This is an important quest because in terms of theory, everything is in place – the right skills, the right activities, and a great combination of important concepts that can ensure success of second language learning. In completing the quest, this section first

discusses the event where CwaD was implemented and how data were gathered to answer the research question of: ‘What is the students’ acceptance level of CwaD?’”

In upholding the Highly Immersive English Programmes (HIEPs) proposed by the ministry, the English teachers of a school in Banting invited a group of lecturers to conduct an English activity with year 5 students. The lecturers are also the researchers and we chose to conduct CwaD. The programme was called ‘English in Camp: Writing it right’. It was a half day programme involving 56 year 5 students, all English language teachers from the school and nine (9) English language teachers/lecturers along with seven (7) students from the university. The main activity was CwaD and it took about four (4) hours to complete from briefing until the production of the paragraph writing. The programme ended with a prize giving ceremony to the winning groups.

In gathering data to answer the research question, we prepared a simple and direct pencil-paper questionnaire. This was chosen considering that the respondents were 56 year 5 students. The questionnaire consists of four dichotomous questions. The dichotomy is symbolised by a smiling face and a sad face. Figure 3 shows the questionnaire. Further, three of the questions are accompanied by two short lines with questions like ‘Why’ and ‘What’. They are for the students to express themselves in detail using words they know.

Feedback from _____
 Year: _____

How do you feel? Circle the face.

Stations 😊 ☹️

a) The best station is STATION ____.
 Why? _____

Learning to write about picnic 😊 ☹️

) What do you like about it? _____

Teachers 😊 ☹️

Everything today 😊 ☹️

a) What is special? _____

Thank you very much. All the best!!!

Figure 3 The Questionnaire

The questions straightforwardly ask about three (3) specific aspects and one (1) general opinion. The latter is regarding the whole experience about CwaD activity while the former focuses on the preferred station, the writing activity and the teachers (the lecturers and students from the university). The participants were guided closely in answering the questionnaire as they are only 11 years old and majority had no experience answering a questionnaire. However, all of them managed to complete it. In fact, they wrote the names of the teachers that they like even though no space is provided and they also expressed themselves in the space for general comments.

Result

As a general answer to the research question of ‘What is the students’ acceptance level of CwaD?’, it can be said that all the participants accepted CwaD happily. This is evident as seen in all the smiling faces circled for all the dichotomous questions asked in the questionnaire. Besides, there are two (2) other findings that can be shared.

Firstly, the station that many of the participants chose to be the best is Station 5 and next is Station 6. Station 5 is on spelling where they did word-building and spelling-it-right on both the laptop and the tab. While Station 6 is on linkers where they had the hands-on experience of making a sandwich and retelling the process using linkers while preparing the sandwich. The participants who chose Station 5 expressed that they like the word-building activity while unsurprisingly, some penned that they like the gadgets. As for Station 6, majority of the expressions written are about liking sandwiches and also the activity of preparing and eating up the sandwiches.

Secondly, the words they chose to express themselves in the questionnaire reflect the elements that they like about CwaD – either regarding the activities, the teachers or the ‘learning’ itself. All the words are positively-connnotated. Most students wrote that the activities were ‘fun’ but they were ‘tired’, and they learnt ‘something new’.

Discussion

Based on the findings regarding the students’ perceptions of CwaD, it can be said that the amalgamation of gamification, perceptual styles and affective filter has made a good impact. CwaD is well-liked by all of the 56 student-participants. When most of the students chose Station 5 as providing the best activity, besides giving the word-building game as the reason, many of them also confessed about the gadgets – computer and tab as being the attractions. The student-participants are digital natives

and thus with the utilisation of gadgets, they are in their comfort zone. This has led to the lowering of the affective filter which facilitates learning.

The end product which is paragraph writing on the topic of 'picnic' was not thoroughly analysed because the session was conducted by their English teachers. However, based on holistic reading of the paragraphs, we could see that the respondents incorporated the picnic-related vocabulary and adjectives learnt, used the correct structure of the paragraph, and inserted suitable linkers to make the paragraph smooth.

Conclusion

Writing requires a complex mind activity. In accomplishing the activity, a learner has to put together various skills and knowledge. 'Carousel with a Destination' or CwaD is a concept that brings all of them together in order to produce a piece of writing. CwaD is underpinned by a conceptual framework that ensures the activities to be fun, meaningful and effective. CwaD can be said as having characteristics which are sustainable and scalable. Hence, it means that CwaD can be used to set different 'destination' or goal. The goal can be achieved by putting together various activities that can be skill or knowledge-based. Furthermore, CwaD is also ready for any number of participants as the number of stations and the number of group members are both adjustable. There are many angles in which CwaD can be investigated.

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