

Using PAVES strategy to increase Primary Three students' confidence in public speaking

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out whether explicit teaching of the mnemonic strategy, Posture, Attitude, Voice, Eye Contact, Smile (PAVES), to Primary three students increases their confidence in a public speaking task, Show and Tell. The students create their own ceramic pieces designed with a National Education (NE) theme in mind and use it as their Show and Tell item. This School Curriculum Innovation (SCI), Be Ready for Public Speaking, bReady4PS, aims to develop students' confidence in public speaking. The lack of practice in the use of the language and the assumption that students already know how to speak in front of the class have led the students to do poorly in oral presentation tasks like Show and Tell and group work presentations. This study involved two intact Primary Three classes of mixed ability students. The Project group (N=33) was explicitly taught the PAVES strategy prior to their Show and Tell assessment and shown the rubrics designed for this assessment. The comparison group (N=33) was just shown the assessment rubrics prior to the assessment. At the end of the study, it was found that the project group performed significantly better for their Show and Tell assessment and also showed an increase in their perception of their confidence level. Implications for further instruction are discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Public Speaking, 21st Century Competencies, Arts Education

Introduction

Be Ready for Public Speaking, bReady4PS, is an SCI that aims to develop students' confidence in public speaking. About 65% of the students in the school come from non-English speaking homes and therefore lack the opportunity to use the English language outside the classroom. As a result, students are not confident about using the language especially in front of an audience even after Show and Tell experiences, as well as Speech and Drama courses as part of the Strategies for Effective Engagement and Development of Pupils in Primary Schools (SEED) Programme at the Primary one and two levels. English is also one subject at the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) in which the school has yet to achieve its target of surpassing national average for quality pass.

As noted in the Ministry of Education press release (March, 2010) about the new framework implemented to enhance the development of 21st century competencies, it is desired that every student should be a confident person who is able to communicate ideas and thoughts effectively, one of the many competencies that prepare them for life ahead. They need to use verbal communication skills for a variety of purposes, whether to inform, persuade or instruct.

The school decided to further explore the use of Show and Tell as a platform to develop Primary Three students' confidence in public speaking. Structured and guided lessons as well as organised public speaking tasks allow students to learn skills that are beneficial to them (King, 2002). However, feedback from English Language teachers surfaced concerns that presentations are often demanded from students with little support and advice on how to present effectively by the teachers (Hay, 1997), often due to time constraints and the need to complete syllabus in school. The school decided to go back to the basics and start formal teaching of the necessary skills to prepare the students for public speaking tasks.

In a study conducted by Burnham in 2005, it was found that public speaking can be the source of significant anxiety for children. Therefore, it is recommended that schools provide interventions to address this especially since apprehension associated with communication increases at about the age of ten (Mc Croskey, Anderson, Richmond & Wheelers, 1981). According to Haber and Lingard (2001), when teachers emphasise that context determines the content, teaching and learning of oral presentation skills may be improved. To make the learning experience authentic and meaningful, the students create their own ceramic pieces designed with an NE theme in mind and use it as their Show and Tell item. In making the ceramic pieces, students are actively engaged and are nurtured to be creative thinkers with school values like self-discipline and perseverance inculcated in them. The school believes that that this project is in line with the school vision to nurture students to be creative thinkers and lifelong learners as well as confident communicators.

Explicit instruction is an instructional approach that is useful for introducing topics and specific skills (Goeke, 2009). A set of mnemonic strategy, Posture, Attitude, Voice, Eye Contact and Smile (PAVES), developed to help students become confident and successful speakers (Combes, 2008), was chosen to be taught to students. The use of explicit instruction provides guided

instruction in the basic understanding of required skills, which students will then build on through practice, collaboration, repetition, and hands on activities (Geoke, 2009). The student's attention is directed to learning specific skills in a structured manner. The PAVES strategies are broken down into parts, taught through explanation and demonstration, and students are guided on their hands-on application of the new learning.

Students will know at the onset of the unit of study, in this case, the teaching of strategies to aid public speaking, what they are expected to learn in classrooms where assessment for learning is practised. At the beginning of the PAVES lessons, the teacher will work with the students to understand what they already know about the topic as well as to identify any gaps they might have. As the lessons progress, the teacher and students work together to assess their knowledge, identify areas they need to improve and how best to extend the skills learnt.

According to Black and Wiliam (1998), the purpose of using Assessment for Learning (AFL) is to provide feedback to both the teacher and learner with regard to the learner's progress towards achieving the learning objectives set. To ensure the process is effective, rubrics have been written to formatively assess the students' performance task.

Art discussion is a key focus in this SCI as it encourages the students to talk about art and this serves different purposes at different stages of the project implementation. Before starting work on the ceramics piece, art discussion helps the students to plan and visualise in their minds what is to be done. Expressing ideas through language should help the students to not only share them but also to clarify them and help them to make their ideas concrete. Szekely (1982) highlighted that such conversations should be a regular part of the classroom activity, and students should be encouraged to participate in them freely with the focus on the current interests of the students with age appropriate vocabulary. The use of art discussion allows students to use the necessary art vocabulary during their Show and Tell. Having been actively engaged in the art making lessons then allows them to better describe their artwork, in a confident manner.

The aim of the study is to assess the effectiveness of the use of explicit instruction in teaching students specific skills on oral presentation using art discussion as a platform. The two main research questions are: "Does the use of PAVES strategy increase students' oral presentation scores?" and "Does the use of PAVES strategy increase students' confidence level?"

Method

Subjects

Pupils

This project involved two Primary Three classes. The project group (N=33) consisted of 13 females and 20 males while the comparison group (N=33) consisted of 14 females and 19 males. Before the project commenced, the two groups' Primary Two Semestral Assessment Two oral examination marks were used to check for group equivalence. The oral examination consists of two components, the reading component and the picture discussion component. The reading component consists of a reading passage of about 50 to 70 words and has a weightage of five marks. The picture discussion component consists of a picture the pupils need to describe what they see. This takes up five marks. The maximum possible score is ten marks. The project group scored a mean score of 7.2 (1.59) and the comparison group 7.5 (1.77). There is a small mean difference of 0.3 in favour of the comparison group. However, the corresponding standardised mean difference (SMD) is 0.17, which is negligible by Cohen's Criteria. Thus the two groups were taken to be equal in English language prior to the implementation of the project.

Table 1. Checking for group equivalence

Measure	Project group (N=33)	Control group (N=33)	Effect size	Remarks
Language	- 7.2 (1.59)	7.5 (1.77)	0.17	Negligible effect

Measures

Perception Survey: A confidence perception survey was conducted to ascertain the level of the students' confidence towards public speaking. The survey was adapted from the Modified Fennema-Sherman Attitude Scales. There are 18 questions and the students rated themselves on a four-point Likert-type scale. A high score in this scale denotes confidence towards the public speaking. The Cronbach Alpha obtained through using the 18 questions was 0.69, showing relatively high internal consistency. By convention, an alpha coefficient of at least 0.7 is accepted for an attitude scale to be considered as yielding reliable scores (Soh, 2008). The score 0.69 is close to the convention score. The survey was also conducted as a post-test.

Show and Tell Assessment Rubrics: The assessment rubrics were designed for assessing the competencies of public speaking skills in the Show and Tell task. The rubrics were designed based on the aspects of PAVES strategies taught to the students, namely Posture, Attitude, Voice, Eye Contact and Smile. Each aspect consists of a scale from one to six. As the scoring could be rather subjective, exemplars were selected from the first Show and Tell assessment. The teachers sat together and viewed the pupils' performances, which were captured on video, to decide as a team on how the students are assessed using the rubrics designed. This

standardization exercise was necessary to lower the possibilities of differences in expectations of the teachers.

Students’ Engagement Scores and Reflections: From the online PETALS Engagement Indicator survey conducted by officers from the Ministry of Education, engagement scores and reflections from students’ responses were used to examine if the intervention yielded positive results for the students. These reflections were used to triangulate the survey and Show and Tell scores.

Procedure

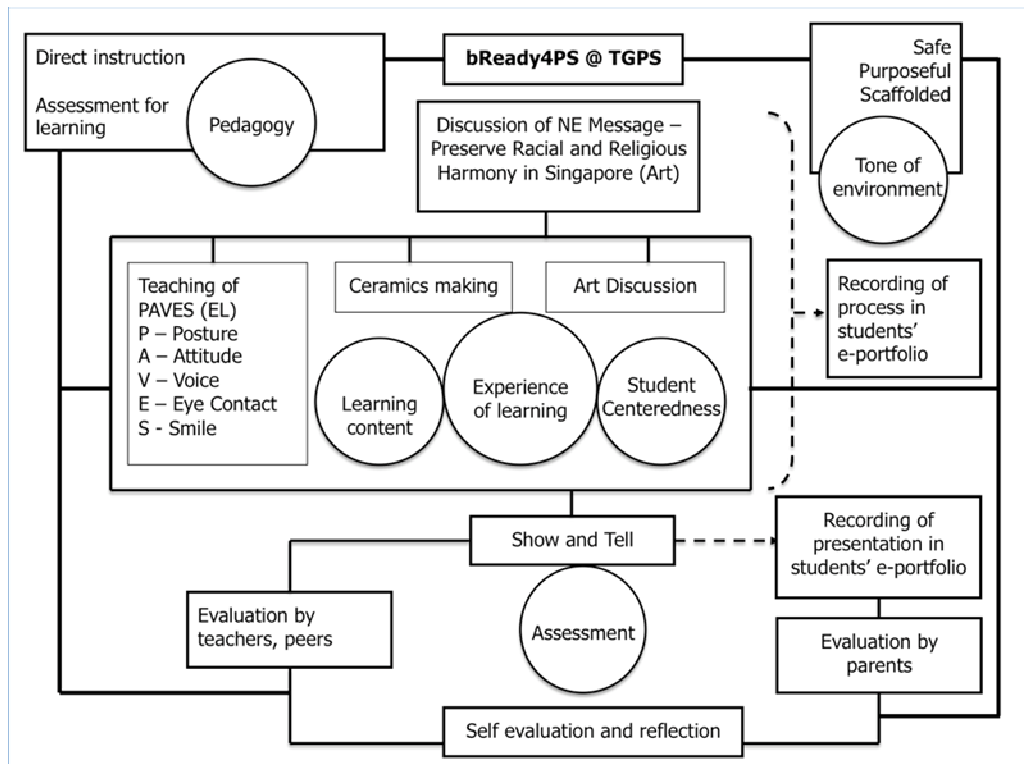


Figure 1: TGPS bReady4PS Framework

At the start of the project, both the project and comparison groups had their first Show and Tell assessment as their pre-test. This Show and Tell was based on an artwork they did. They were given the dates for their Show and Tell assessment and they had to prepare for the Show and Tell on their own. The students’ presentations were recorded and the teachers then assessed the students based on the Show and Tell assessment rubrics (Appendix 1). Prior to assessing the students, the teachers participated in a standardisation session where exemplars were chosen and teachers assessed them together to reach a consensus as to what scores should be awarded to the students.

The project implementation covered a span of two terms. Strategies employed were chosen to maximise students' academic potential by providing them with authentic learning. As can be seen in the figure above (Figure 1), the PETALS framework is used as the foundation of the project, providing clear directions for the SCI team. Both the project and comparison groups started off with a series of lessons on discussion of the NE theme - Preserve Racial and Religious Harmony in Singapore. This discussion provided students with ideas on how to link the message and its meaning to images.

The art discussion lessons that followed provided a good platform for the students to experience the power of creation and communication of their ideas and feelings to others. Questions were asked to develop students' visual inquiry skills and provoke curiosity so as to motivate them to be active learners. They also help students to better understand and share their feelings on artworks. This enhances students' cognitive abilities and higher order thinking skills. Following the discussion, students watched videos on the technical aspects of ceramics making and then moved on to the hands-on experience of creating their ceramics pieces based on their sketches. This whole process took about five weeks.

For the project group, the students were then taught a series of six one-hour lessons based on the PAVES strategies. The students were guided through the process through role-modeling and sharing of personal anecdotes by their teacher, and viewing slides and videos clips of positive and negative examples. In the process, students learnt how to assess their own peers and help each other grow to be better and confident speakers. Upon completion of the PAVES lessons, the students were then assessed for the second time. The comparison group did not undergo the PAVES lessons but they were shown the rubrics before they were assessed for the second time and the teacher explained each criteria to the students.

Analysis

Data was collected through the Show and Tell assignments, confidence perception surveys and questionnaires before and after the intervention.

Pretest and Posttest Show and Tell assignments were used to collect data of the students public speaking ability. For the first Show and Tell, the students had to prepare their own speech for a selected art piece. For the second Show and Tell, the students had to prepare their speech for the ceramics art piece they created. The Show and Tell were recorded and the students were given scores based on the Show and Tell rubrics (Appendix 1).

Questionnaires A confidence perception survey was used to collect data of the students' perception of their confidence level before and after the intervention. The students indicated the extent to which they agreed with the given 18 statements on a four-point Likert-type scale (Appendix 2). The students also completed the PETALS Engagement Indicator survey before and after the intervention.

Results

As shown in Table 2, the project group attained a higher mean score compared to the comparison group for the second Show and Tell. The mean of the comparison group remained the same at 15.0 while the project group showed an improvement from a mean of 16.4 to 25.4. The corresponding effect size of 1.80 is very large according to Cohen's criteria.

Table 2. Show and Tell mean scores

Measure	Project group (N=33)	Control group (N=33)	Effect size	Remarks
Pre-test	16.4 (4.77)	15.0 (3.43)	0.29	Small effect
Post-test	25.4 (5.75)	15.0 (3.43)	1.80	Very large effect

According to Hattie's study (1999), the use of reinforcement and direct instruction brings about effect sizes of 1.13 and 0.82 respectively. Providing corrective feedback also brings about an effect size of 0.94. All these indicate a large to very large effect by Cohen's criteria. Thus the explicit teaching of the PAVES strategy is found to be effective to improve the presentation scores of students doing Show and Tell.

Just showing assessment rubrics to the comparison class before the second Show and Tell did not see an improvement in the presentation scores. The mean score remains at 15.0.

Table 3 shows the results of mean comparisons on the confidence perception survey scores done by the students before the first Show and Tell and after the second Show and Tell. The mean difference of 2.1 is in favour of the project group with a corresponding SMD of 0.62 that is medium in size by Cohen's criteria.

Table 3. Confidence Perception survey mean scores

Measure	Project group (N=33)	Control group (N=33)	Effect size	Remarks
Pre-test	50.7 (4.88)	50.6 (5.39)	0.03	Negligible effect
Post-test	53.2 (3.38)	51.2 (4.33)	0.62	Medium effect

From the results, it is noted that students do better in their Show and Tell, but they do not necessarily feel that they are more confident about speaking in front of the class. This could be due to the fact that although students feel that the skills taught to them have helped them to present better in front of their classmates, they still feel nervous about the task. The teachers teaching the project group suggested that the students could possibly feel more confident if they are provided with more opportunities to speak in front of the class regularly and across all subjects rather than just the language classes.

From the reflections collected in the online survey, it can be seen that the students have internalised the skills taught to them and they found the PAVES strategies helpful for them. They were also aware of the areas they still needed work in and even though they may not

enjoy speaking in front of an audience, they realised the importance of learning the strategies to improve their public speaking skills.

In English PAVES I learned how to increase my voice. In show and tell I increased my voice so that everyone can hear me. I felt great after my show and tell.

PAVES could help me with my voice and eye contact because my voice is very bad and my eye contact is very bad.

I tell you the truth I really hate show and tell. I am always shy . When I am shy, I will always be miserable and maybe monotone . I learn how to smile , (use my) voice, (and have a positive) attitude. If you want to do show and tell, remember PAVES.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether the use of explicit instruction in teaching students the PAVES strategy using art discussion as a platform would increase students' oral presentation scores in Show and Tell and also whether their confidence level will increase with the learning of these skills. The results were very encouraging where the Show and Tell scores were concerned. The marked improvement in scores as well as the reflections from the students indicated that they have internalised the skills taught to them and they are aware that they should use the skills when they stand in front of the class to present. The teachers also indicated that the project group class has established a common language that they use to help each other when they do oral presentations. The teachers believe that "public speaking tasks empower students" as they "take charge of their own learning and communicate their knowledge to others" (Iberri-Shea, 2009, p. 24).

As mentioned by Harste, Burke and Woodward (1981), oral language development in a child is greatly influenced by the environment and authentic experiences. The use of ceramics making and art discussion helped the students to understand the whole art making process better and they felt more confident about speaking about a topic they know very well. This deliberate attempt to improve the quality of learning helped the teachers to understand the importance of going back to the basics and teaching the necessary skills. It helped our students to be more confident and better prepared when standing in front of the class. By providing feedback to students on their performance and what directions the student must take to make improvement, the students were aware on areas they needed to improve on. From this project, the teachers were able to learn in greater detail, the use of rubrics and the importance of having a common understanding of how rubrics are used for formative assessment.

The implementation of the project was tedious due to the logistics involved in the ceramics making lessons and also ensuring the Art teacher and English Language teacher conduct the respective art-making lessons and PAVES lessons at the right juncture. For next year, more time will be allocated for the teaching of the PAVES strategies especially for the heavier components like Voice where students could be taught more in-depth and be given ample time for practice. The teaching of the PAVES strategy will also be extended to the Primary 2 and Primary 4 levels so more students can make use of this easy to remember strategy in their presentations. At the Primary 2 level, the students will be taught a simplified version of PAVES for them to do their poetry recitation as part of the holistic assessment. At the Primary 4 level, the students will be given more opportunity to use the strategy when they do their presentations. As it is noted by the teachers that the students need help with the writing of their scripts for presentations, the students will be taught script writing as well. With the full implementation of the students' e-portfolio in the following year, students will be able to extend their learning and benefit more from the feedback from their peers, teachers and parents.

Although speaking is one of the key components of the teaching of language in school, it is often neglected (Combes, 2008). Moreover, with our students mainly coming from non-English speaking homes, it is vital that the teachers do more to help the students overcome apprehension for public speaking tasks. It is also vital that the students have “a positive and accurate belief about themselves and their abilities” as well as “the commitment and responsibility” to see through their goals (Arnold, J. & de Andres, V., 2010, p. 4). The findings are indeed encouraging for teachers who have put in much time and effort to plan and implement the project. The school is excited to continue to make learning more meaningful and effective for our students, to equip them with the 21st Century Skills to face future challenges.

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Appendix 1

Primary 3 - PAVES Rubrics

Circle the score on the scale

Posture						
Demonstrates appropriate body posture (stand straight, standing without support, no fidgeting)	Never				All the time	
	1	2	3	4	5	6

Attitude						
Demonstrates a positive attitude about the Show and Tell Task	Never				All the time	
	1	2	3	4	5	6

Voice	Below Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
Expression and Tone	Is monotonous and lacks expression	Attempts to vary the tone and have some form of expression	Varies the tone and expression is very evident
	1 2	3 4	5 6
Fluency	Has an inappropriate pace and makes incorrect pauses. (Jerky delivery)	Has an appropriate pace and makes some attempts at pauses	Has a good pace and makes the right pauses
	1 2	3 4	5 6
Clarity	Words are muffled and difficult to understand	Some words are not pronounced clearly	Words are pronounced clearly
	1 2	3 4	5 6

Eye Contact	Below Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
Eye Contact with Audience	Does not attempt to make eye contact with the audience at times	Attempts to make eye contact at times	Eye contact is maintained with the audience throughout the presentation
	1 2	3 4	5 6

Smile						
Appropriate facial expression with attempts to smile at the audience appropriately	Never			All the time		
	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix 2

Confidence Perception Survey

Put a tick in the box that best describes how you feel for each of the statements.

	Strongly agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I am able to talk more about I like very much, like my favourite toy or book.				
I am able to talk about something I have done, like an art piece.				
I am able to talk about any subject if I know it well enough.				

	Strongly agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I prepare what to say on my own for Show and Tell in school.				
I can accept ideas on how to improve on my show and tell.				
I find it difficult to speak in front of the class.				
I choose what I want to talk about on my own.				
I try to improve when others tell me there are areas I am not so good in.				
I can handle most tasks at school, but I just can't do a good job with Show and Tell.				
I need my parents to help me prepare for Show and Tell in school.				
I feel upset when others tell me there are areas I need to improve on.				
I know I can do well in Show and Tell				
I need my parents to tell me what to talk about.				
I am afraid my friends will laugh at me when I am doing show and tell				
I am sure I could handle speaking in front of a bigger audience				
I am sure that I can learn how to improve on Show and Tell.				
I learn from others how to speak better.				
I am no good in Show and Tell				