UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

A CREATIVE ARTS APPROACH IN TEACHING ESL AT TI-RATANA ORPHANAGE, DESA PETALING, MALAYSIA

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IPSS 2008 6

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BY

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

April 2008

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

A CREATIVE ARTS APPROACH IN TEACHING ESL AT TI-RATANA ORPHANAGE, DESA PETALING, MALAYSIA

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Chairman: **Professor Rahim Md. Sail, PhD**

Faculty: **Institute for Social Science Studies**

Drawing from Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, this research study attempts to explore the potential of the creative arts to teach English as a second language based on the sociocultural theory of learning. The "We Love English!" tuition program utilized the creative arts to teach English as a second language to students living at Ti-Ratana, a Buddhist home for children in Desa Petaling. As a participant-observer, the researcher served as the creative arts director, a volunteer teacher, and a monthly team leader. Research data sources included direct observations made during the lessons; interviews with six volunteer teachers, two program organizers, and one childminder; and analysis of pertinent primary documents. Through comprehensive content analysis, the data were analyzed, categorized, and organized according to specific units of data, which represent inductive and deductive themes in the data. The major findings of this study consist of significant themes that surfaced in all three data

sources during analysis. Every effort was made to strengthen the validity and reliability of this study, including data triangulation, the creation of an audit trail, user generalizability, heavy researcher involvement, peer evaluation, thick, rich descriptions, and reflexivity to guard against researcher bias.

In short, the data generated from this research study suggest that the creative activities utilized during the "We Love English!" tuition program have the potential to teach English as a second language by creating the necessary environment in which sociocultural learning can take place – namely, by facilitating relationships, promoting social interaction, and fostering zones of proximal development. The creative activities facilitated a friendly, English-speaking environment in which students and volunteer teachers could interact freely and, consequently, build relationships. The relationships between the students and volunteers also appeared to put the students at ease in an English-speaking environment and encourage them to practice English while making language learning more fun. Limitations to the study include lack of time and volunteer turnover. The use of rapid analysis technique following interviews was one method used to mitigate the results of the lack of time, and there were six consistent volunteers, which helped to reduce the effect of volunteer turnover.

The findings of this study could contribute to the field of community development and language education. Specifically, this project could serve as a model for community development and educational programs geared towards teaching English as a second language through the creative arts, especially to children at risk. This research study could also provide suggestions related to creating environments

conducive for children to interact and build relationships as well as to explore, create, manipulate, and solve problems – ultimately, to reach their maximum learning potential. By creating a comfortable, familiar environment in which sociocultural learning can be realized, a relational, interactive approach to education is critical for maximizing the potential of students, especially children at risk. Therefore, second-language education programs should explore the option of incorporating the creative arts. Education programs that are already based on the sociocultural learning theory could benefit from increased attention to the creative arts. This study also encourages volunteerism, as the findings indicate that dedicated, consistent teachers are critical in order for the creative arts to be effective in fostering relationships and encouraging social interaction. In the end, this research project demonstrates that the creative arts, when utilized in an English tuition program, have the potential to catalyze relationships, increase student interaction, and foster zones of proximal development, all of which contribute to sociocultural learning. It is hoped that further research will provide more conclusive links between the creative arts and second language learning and acquisition.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENDEKATAN SENI KREATIF DALAM PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI RUMAH ANAK YATIM TI-RATANA, DESA PETALING

Oleh

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Pengerusi : **Profesor Rahim Md. Sail, PhD**

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Berasaskan daripada teori sosiobudaya pembelajaran oleh Vygotsky, kajian ini cuba menunjukkan sama ada aktiviti kreatif (creative arts) boleh digunakan bagi memupuk perhubungan dan interaksi sokongan sosial dalam konteks program tuisyen "Kami Cintakan Bahasa Inggeris!". Program tuisyen ini adalah untuk pelajar-pelajar yang tinggal di Rumah Kebajikan Ti-Ratana (sebuah rumah kebajikan Buddhist) di Desa Petaling dengan menggunakan aktiviti kreatif sebagai pendekatan pengajaran dan pembelajaran.

Sebagai pemerhati ikut serta, pengkaji juga adalah pengarah Aktiviti Kreatif, Guru Sukarela dan Ketua Pasukan Bulanan. Sumber data yang dikumpul adalah melalui pemerhatian terus semasa kelas; temu duga dengan enam guru sukarela, dua orang pengendali program dan seorang penjaga kanak-kanak; dan analisis dokumen penting.

Melalui analisis kandungan yang komprehensif, data yang dikumpul dikategori dan disusun mengikut unit spesifik melalui tema-tema induktif dan deduktif. Hasil utama kajian mengandungi tema-tema signifikan yang timbul daripada ketiga-tiga sumber data. Segala usaha untuk mengukuhkan validiti dan reliabiliti kajian dilaksanakan seperti triangulasi, 'audit trail', generalizabiliti pengguna, penglibatan yang banyak daripada pengkaji, penilaian rakan sebaya, huraian terperinci dan luas, dan refleksibiti untuk mencegah bias pengkaji.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa aktiviti kreatif yang digunakan semasa program tuisyen membantu dalam memupuk perhubungan dan menyokong interaksi sosial. Aktiviti kreatif mewujudkan suasana kemesraan berbahasa Inggeris di mana pelajar dan guru sukarela boleh berinteraksi secara bebas dan membina perhubungan. Perhubungan di antara pelajar dengan sukarelawan juga didapati selesa di mana pelajar dapat bertutur Bahasa Inggeris dalam suasana mesra yang menggalakkan mereka membuat latihan dan menjadikan pembelajaran bahasa sebagai sesuatu yang gembira. Kekangan dalam melaksanakan kajian ini termasuklah masa yang terbatas di samping pertukaran sukarelawan yang kerap. Penggunaan teknik analisis cepat selepas temuduga merupakan salah satu cara untuk mengatasi kesuntukan masa di samping kewujudan enam orang sukarelawan yang "tetap" bagi mengurangkan kesan pertukaran yang sering berlaku.

Implikasi daripada hasil kajian ini mempunyai impak yang besar terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris secara tradisional di Malaysia. Pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa yang berorientasikan peperiksaan, seperti yang diamalkan di Malaysia, seharusnya menggalakkan pelajar bukan sahaja untuk menyediakan diri bagi menghadapi peperiksaan tetapi juga harus menjejaki ruang lingkup kreativiti

mereka dengan rakan sebaya. Ini selari dengan apa yang disarankan oleh Mahathir (1998) dalam "The Way Forward" bagi mencapai matlamat pembangunan di mana Malaysia seharusnya menumpukan perhatian kepada pelajar-pelajar yang terpinggir (seperti pelajar Bumiputra). Dengan mewujudkan suasana selesa dan mesra di mana pembelajaran sosiobudaya boleh berlaku, pendekatan perhubungan dan interaktif dalam pendidikan adalah kritikal untuk memaksimumkan potensi pelajar yang terpinggir. Oleh yang demikian, program pendidikan bahasa kedua seharusnya meninjau opsyen mengintegrasi aktiviti kreatif bagi meningkatkan keberkesanannya. Program pendidikan yang sudah pun diasaskan dengan teori sosiobudaya seharusnya mendapat faedah daripada peningkatan penggunaan aktiviti kreatif. Kajian ini juga mendapati peranan sukarelawan yang berdedikasi dapat membantu keberkesanaan aktiviti kreatif untuk memupuk perhubungan dan menggalakkan interaksi sosial. Kajian ini telah dapat membuktikan bahawa aktiviti kreatif, apabila digunakan dalam program tuisyen, boleh meningkatkan perhubungan dan interaksi pelajar yang menyumbang kepada pembelajaran sosiobudaya. Adalah diharapkan bahawa kajian lanjut dilaksanakan untuk membuktikan kaitan yang lebih konkrit di antara aktiviti kreatif dengan pembelajaran dan penguasaan bahasa kedua.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the School of Graduate Studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia for the unique opportunity in which to gain a Master's degree. I would also like to thank the Chairperson of my Supervisory Committee, Prof. Dr. Rahim Md. Sail, and the other members of my Supervisory Committee, Prof. Dr. Shamsuddin Ahmad and Prof. Sharifah Zainab Syed Abd. Rahman, for their significant time and guidance.

I would also like to thank the Rotary Foundation and the Rotary Club of Marietta-Metro and the Rotary Club of Ampang for their immeasurable support and friendship. In the same way, I would like to thank the Rotaract Club of Kuala Lumpur for inviting me to share in the "We Love English!" tuition program. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my husband, Dan, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

A nation's human capital is cultivated one community at a time, and the advancement of a community begins with education. For students to contribute to the advancement of their communities, they must be given learning spaces and opportunities to interact, explore, create, manipulate, and solve problems (Degge & McFee, 1980). Classrooms which imitate real-life settings are said to develop students' "employable skills", such as enthusiasm, adaptability, initiative, problem solving skills, and confidence (Jamaliah, 2005, p. 57). To maximize students' potential for learning, therefore, interactive approaches to education should be explored.

According to Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the founder of the sociocultural theory of learning, the development of higher mental functions is best cultivated in social settings where interaction is mediated by tools such as symbols and signs (Appel & Lantolf, 1994). As social beings, students develop consciousness and higher forms of mental functions through interaction with others (Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis, 1999; Lantolf, 2005). Put another way, learning is best facilitated through interaction, both social and psychological. Tools, or cultural artifacts, mediate this interaction. The most common cultural artifact being language, language learning is best conducted in social environments where relationships are facilitated (Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Ellis, 1999). Furthermore, the most effective form of interaction is that

in which a more competent peer or instructor assists the learner to perform a particular function. Vygotsky hypothesized that what a learner is capable of doing with assistance, he or she will eventually be able to perform independently. The student's maximum potential for learning is realized in the zone of proximal development – the difference between what the student can do with the instructor and what the student is capable of doing alone (Ellis, 1999; Lantolf, 2005). Interaction is most effective within the student's zone of proximal development. Therefore, two key ingredients in sociocultural learning are social interaction and relationships, especially constructive relationships between students and teachers. It could be said that the sociocultural approach to learning is essentially a community-based approach to education.

Sociocultural learning can best be described in contrast with more common rote learning techniques. Rote learning is the process of memorization and repetition with little, if any, social interaction during the learning process (Brown, 2000). Rote learning is dependent upon a content-based syllabus and an exam-oriented educational structure. Students thus trained are prepared only for exams, and information learned is often lost as soon as it is no longer needed (Brown, 2000). As a result, students taught in this manner are unable to recall information and to creatively apply the information to other problems. In short, rote learning techniques fail to recognize that learning is an intrinsically social process that is best conducted in an interactive, social environment.

Implications of rote learning are even more profound for children at risk, who are already academically challenged due to a variety of other factors, including their social and emotional environment outside of school. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child classifies children at risk as children who suffer from abuse

of all kinds, hunger, poverty, war, natural disasters, and who are not granted their basic rights, as spelled out in the Convention (United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). In addition, children who are separated from their parents are considered children at risk. These children, although capable, often lack the rich opportunities to contribute to the growth of their community. This is due to factors beyond their control, including absent parents, single-parented families, uneducated or unemployed parents, low-income, or other family dysfunctionality. These factors can affect children's academic performance; due to extreme internal or external conditions in their lives, they cannot keep up with the educational demands required of them in order to succeed in school (Kamarulzaman, 2005; Jamaliah, 2005; Rosse, 2005). According to one study, children's home and school environment, including the support they receive at home and at school, greatly influences their academic ability (Jamaliah, 2005). As children at risk do not have access to stimulating and creatively rich environments at home, more traditional, rote-learning environments do not provide the academic support that can be necessary for children at risk. Children who experience poor academic achievement due to difficult circumstances outside of school are at greater risk of academic failure, which can be detrimental to their success in life. Many children who encounter inadequate academic success experience low self-esteem and dwindling academic aspirations, which eventually compels them to drop out of school altogether (Kamarulzaman, 2005; Jamaliah, 2005; Rosse, 2005). In addition, classroom size, teacher support, avenues for expression, curriculum structure, and language proficiency significantly impact the lives of children at risk in school (Benton, 2005; Jamaliah, 2005; Rosse, 2005). Research also indicates that a lack of adequate language proficiency in both the native language and a second language, if applicable, can further damage children's

school experience, resulting in poor academic performance and school drop out (Benton, 2005; Jamaliah, 2005). In short, children at risk are in danger of not performing successfully in school, which places them at a disadvantage in other areas of life. These children should be given more opportunities to interact in an environment where maximum learning can take place.

Just as Vygotsky understood the importance of social interaction in learning, he also emphasized the interconnectedness of intelligence and art. According to Vygotsky, the arts, consisting of different forms of symbols, help to mediate interaction and actualize meaning (Spina, 2006). Vygotsky argues that skills employed in language learning can be described in two categories: contextualized and decontextualized (Spina, 2006). Decontextualized skills can be applied to present circumstances, but they are not necessarily transferable. Contextualized skills, on the other hand, can be transferred to other situations (Spina, 2006). Ultimately, language learning should develop contextualized skills, which help students use language in real-life, daily situations. Vygotsky and others believe that the arts aid in developing contextualized skills (Spina, 2006). The arts also assist with scaffolding, a learning process in which new material is anchored onto existing information in the cognitive structure (Degge & McFee, 1980; O'Shannessy & Woods, 2002; Spina, 2006). The arts contribute to the mental, emotional, and social development of students. As a form of communication, the creative arts can provide balance between the subjective self and objective reality, thus enabling students to understand themselves and the world around them – an ultimate goal of the sociocultural theory (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Gotshalk, 1964; Read, 1974). There are studies suggesting that creative activities contribute to language learning. One study in a second language classroom

investigated whether the arts contribute to target language acquisition while also preserving the native language (Spina, 2006). The researcher found a connection between the arts and improvements in both the target language and the native language and concluded that the arts enhance both first and second language acquisition (Spina, 2006). In another study involving a discourse-based activity in a second language classroom, the researcher discovered that the interactive activity contributed to language acquisition while also establishing a comfortable and familiar learning environment (Manyak, 2008). Other studies have investigated the use of specific types of art, including music, drama, playwriting, and poetry in promoting second language learning and acquisition.

Problem Statement

In summary, in order to foster creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills, it is essential that students have educational spaces in which to explore, interact, create, and solve problems. These spaces can particularly benefit children at risk, who often face academic disappointment in more traditional learning environments due to the emotional stress related to factors outside of school. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory is based on the premise that learning occurs through social interaction and constructive relationships, especially between teachers and students. The social environment required for sociocultural learning to take place naturally involves interaction, creativity, and student engagement in activities and problem-solving skills. As language is a foundational artifact in sociocultural learning theory, Vygotsky argues that language learning is best conducted in a social setting. The creative arts, according to Vygotsky, are intricately linked to cognitive development.

Creative arts have also been used to facilitate first and second language development. In line with the sociocultural theory, therefore, the creative arts have the potential to serve as tools or cultural artifacts that can mediate the interaction between the learner and his/her environment.

Although the theoretical framework has been laid, very few studies have been conducted to explore how second language classrooms can foster the crucial relationships and encourage the interaction necessary for zones of proximal development to be realized and for sociocultural learning to take place. What's more, there have been even fewer studies to investigate the potential of the arts to contribute to sociocultural language learning, especially when teaching children at risk. Essentially, this study endeavors to build a bridge between the creative arts and sociocultural language learning, especially for children at risk.

This study investigated the "We Love English!" language tuition program conducted in a Buddhist, Malaysian orphanage in Desa Petaling. Officially known as Persatuan Kebajikan Ti Ratana, this facility houses approximately 120 students (Observation Notes 1, Characteristics of Orphanage/Context Example 2, 5 March 2006). The "We Love English!" tuition program was designed and implemented by the Rotaract Club of Kuala Lumpur, a humanitarian organization for young professionals. The tuition project was designed to create a fun and creative environment in which the students could practice English. With this in mind, the program incorporated an "interactive teaching style", and the program organizers encouraged the volunteer teachers to be creative and have fun (Observation Notes 1, Objectives of the Program Example 2, 5 March 2006). The program consisted entirely of creative activities such as creative group activities, creative games, role-play, drawing, singing, hands-on activities,

movement/dance, and storytelling. The respondents for this study included five volunteer teachers, two program organizers, and one childminder from the orphanage. There were a total of 30 students who participated in the tuition program.
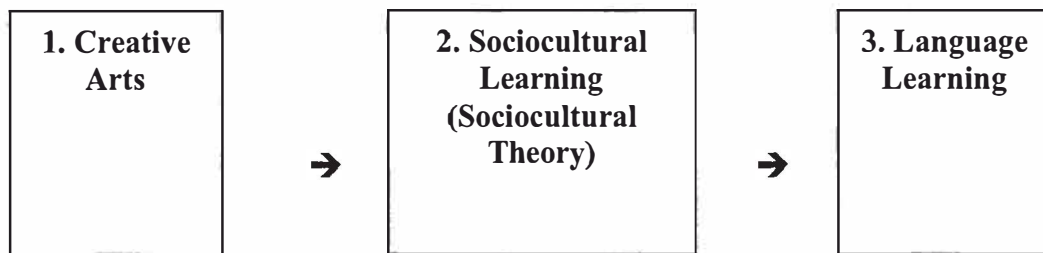
Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study has been to explore the potential of the creative arts in teaching English as a second language to separated children based on the sociocultural theory of learning. Through a qualitative case study design, this research project investigated the "We Love English!" tuition program at the Malaysian orphanage Ti-Ratana in Desa Petaling. The study utilized three sources of data collection: observations, interviews, and document analysis. The respondents of the interviews were six volunteer teachers, two program organizers, and one caretaker at the orphanage. The study was conducted over a period of six months: three months of observations and three months of interviews. The investigation was guided by the following research question:

> What potential do the creative arts have in teaching English as a second
> language based on the sociocultural theory of learning to children at risk in the
> Ti-Ratana orphanage in Desa Petaling?

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the sociocultural theory of language learning. The sociocultural theory provides the strong theoretical link between Sociocultural Learning (2) and Language Learning (3). Therefore, this study aims to address how sociocultural language learning can be achieved in the first place. As the creative arts are the toolset used in the "We Love English!" tuition program to

teach English as a second language, this study attempts to fill in the gap between the Creative Arts (1) and Sociocultural Learning (2).

1. Creative Arts	→	2. Sociocultural Learning (Sociocultural Theory)	→	3. Language Learning

Significance of the Research

It is anticipated that this research project will establish a link between using the creative arts in a language tuition program and catalyzing the relationships and encourage the social interaction necessary for zones of proximal development to be realized and for sociocultural learning to take place. In other words, if the creative arts can indeed foster relationship building and provide a space and opportunity for social interaction to take place, then the creative arts could be used to create the necessary environment for sociocultural learning to transpire.

This discovery could contribute to the field of community development and language education. Specifically, this project could serve as a model for community development and educational programs geared towards teaching English as a second language through the creative arts, such as extracurricular programs developed by nonprofit organizations like the Rotary or Rotaract Clubs. This research study could provide significant implications and suggestions related to providing environments conducive for children to interact and build relationships as well as to explore, create, manipulate, and solve problems – ultimately, to reach their maximum learning potential.

As the volunteers in this project were vital to the aim of the study, this project could also highlight the need for volunteerism – volunteer instructors in educational programs who are willing to devote time and energy to encourage and demonstrate interaction – in developing relationships with students.

Considering that this study also involves marginalized children, this project could indicate learning environments, especially for language learning, that might be favorable for other vulnerable children, such as the Orang Asli children or other disadvantaged Bumiputra children in Malaysia.

Study Limitations

Despite every effort to minimize the limitations, inadequacies inevitably arose during this study. Perhaps the largest limitation in this research study is time. I was only able to observe and participate in nine out of twelve lessons for the English tuition program, as I was forced to miss three weeks due to scholarship obligations and personal responsibilities. Due to the lack of time, I was also forced to conduct interviews close together if not on the same day. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, I utilized a rapid analysis technique in order to record preliminary themes before moving on to the next interview to strengthen reliability and validity.

It might be suggested that there is a possible lack of complete data saturation due to the lack of time and the small sample size. Although the lack of time is an admitted limitation, the small sample selection is merely a result of a small case study. As a case study is a "bounded system", the sample selections in the case are inevitable

(Merriam, 1998). In fact, the sample is intentionally small, precisely because I was attempting to understand this particular phenomenon for this specific group of people (Merriam, 1998). In regard to the small number of volunteer teacher respondents, only six volunteer teachers met the selection criteria, which included the requirement to have participated regularly throughout the program. This is directly related to the other limitation of this study: volunteer turnover.

The need for volunteers to attend the lessons consistently was a prevalent theme throughout the "We Love English!" tuition program. Consistency was a critical to create an environment conducive for relationship building between the volunteer teachers and the students, especially for fostering trust and familiarity. For instance, the children were more willing to practice English with the volunteer teachers they trusted because they had developed a relationship with them (Interview, Li Sun, 1 September 2006). Every effort was made to ensure the consistent participation of the volunteer teachers, and the program organizers emphasized consistency from the very beginning of the program (Observation Notes 1, Importance of Consistency Example 3, 5 March 2006; Observation Notes 1, Importance of Consistency Example 3, 5 March 2006). For example, the program organizers implemented more strict volunteer criteria than they had in a previous tuition program (Interview, Michael, 1 September 2006; Interview, Xinni, 1 September 2006). These criteria included at least a one-month commitment from the volunteer teachers (Interview, Michael, 1 September 2006; Interview, Xinni, 1 September 2006). By requiring one month commitments, the organizers hoped that the volunteer teachers would be better able to commit, and once they were personally invested in the relationships with the children, then they would be more interested to remain as volunteers for the entirety of the program

(Interview, Michael, 1 September 2006). Therefore, according to the Rotaract Club members, this program did experience more consistency of volunteer participation than a previous program (Interview, Michael, 1 September 2006; Interview, Xinni, 1 September 2006).

Despite the clear message conveyed at the beginning of the program, volunteer turnover did occur throughout the program. There were numerous occasions when volunteers were unable to attend the lessons either due to religious celebrations, personal schedules, or work responsibilities (Observation Notes 3, Importance of Consistency Example 4, 26 March 2006; Observation Notes 3, Importance of Consistency Example 8, 26 March 2006; Observation Notes 3, Importance of Consistency Example 6, 26 March 2006; Observation Notes 4, Importance of Consistency Example 10, 2 April 2006). There were also different volunteer teachers coming and going each week, and some volunteers would bring friends with them, which caused the students to be uncomfortable and easily distracted (Observation Notes 3, Importance of Consistency Example 9, 26 March 2006; Observation Notes 7, Importance of Consistency Example 16, 14 May 2006; Observation Notes 3, Importance of Consistency Example 9, 26 March 2006; Observation Notes 7, Importance of Consistency Example 16, 14 May 2006; Interview, Veronica, 14 September 2006). As a result of the shortage of volunteers, some volunteer teachers were forced to teach a different standard each week, which confused the students (Observation Notes 5, Importance of Consistency Example 14, 9 April 2006). When the volunteer teachers were not consistently present at the lessons, the ensuing commotion hindered the relationship-building process and sometimes disrupted the environment for optimal learning. In some cases, students were even unable to