Communication, Language and Literacy in Trinidad and Tobago

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C O N N E X I O N S

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Chapter 1

Communication, Experience and Meaning: a theoretical perspective (for T&T teachers)[1]

- MODULE OUTLINE:
- Definition of terms
- The nature of Language and Experience
- Making meaning and creole-influenced students
- Code-switching
- Talk and Communication in the Community
- Implications for Teacher Training

HOW TO USE THIS MODULE: (1) Read each section below. (2) Go to "Links" in the nav. panel and read/browse the related links. (3) Anticipate questions you might ask during a course on this subject. (4) Join the discussion at the end of the module.

DEFINITION OF TERMS– 1) Language: is that "ability which every normal human being has, and it allows him(her) not only to communicate with other human beings but also with himself(herself). It facilitates the transmission of ideas, emotions and desires from individual to individual and the refinement of the same within the individual. It is therefore external in the form of sound and symbol and internal as mental activity" ..."'a' language refers to one recognizable, identifiable or accepted entity used by one or more communities of speakers." (Roberts, pp. 3-4)

2) Communication: "is the process of exchanging information and ideas. An active process, it involves encoding, transmitting, and decoding intended messages. There are many means of communicating and many different language systems. Speech and language are only a portion of communication. Other aspects of communication may enhance or even eclipse the linguistic code. These aspects are paralinguistic, non-linguistic, and metalinguistic. Paralinguistic mechanisms signal attitude or emotion and include intonation, stress, rate of delivery, and pause or hesitation. Nonlinguistic clues include gestures, body posture, facial expression, eye contact, head and body movement, and physical distance or proxemics. Metalinquistic cues signal the status of communication based on our intuitions about the acceptability of utterances. In other words, metalinguistic skills enable us to talk about language, analyze it, think about it, separate it from context, and judge it." (senate.psu.edu/curriculum_resources)

3) Experience "can be defined as acts that produce, create, and invent knowledge for effects upon the future." V. Lark (?)

4) Meaning "is a distinct level of cognitive significance that represents how people understand the world

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m14096/1.6/>.

around them–literally, the reality they construct in their minds that explains the world they experience..." (Nathan Shedroff)

5) In the English-speaking Caribbean linguistic variation has been the source of much study. De Camp (1974) talked of the existence of a post-creole continuum which stretches from Standard/International English to Creole. There are many variants between these poles. Varilingualism is said to be a characteristic of the speech of West Indians (Youssef, 1992). A speaker switches back and forth along the continuum as (s)he is best able to and as the need arises. Code-switching is a fact of life in West Indian social interaction.

*ON THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND EXPERIENCE: Experience resides in the purposes for which language is used. Among these purposes or functions are (1) Expressive, (2) Communicative and (3) Thought functions as in inner discourse and verbal thought.One of the main functions of language for children is the creation, expression and communication of meaning. This is often identified with experience or the "bed" which generates meaning.

"The forms of language are arbitrary and do not generate out of themselves the meanings with which they are associated. When someone wants to communicate something in language, his (her) starting points are not the arbitrary elements of language. Rather (s)he starts from his experience–feelings, images, sensations, intuitions, thoughts...Thus our speaker's task is to encode and express those non-verbal contents in linguistic form. Conversely, when someone listens to a speaker or reads, (s)he does not have direct or ummediated access to what the speaker (or writer)meant–the listener (reader) himself(herself) creates the meanings...which "partake of the personal, the unique, the private experiences of speakers, hearers, readers." (Holdaway, pp.150-3) Making meaning is a creative function of language and this depends on the experience and verbal competence of the listener or reader.

*MAKING MEANING AND CREOLE-INFLUENCED STUDENTS: In the English-speaking Caribbean Standard English is the language of the educated.Its characteristics are prestige, decorum and polite behaviour and has it high social value, while Creole speech is still sometimes regarded as "noise" and is associated with lower-class behaviour. But Creole speech, the qualities of which are naturalness and spontaniety, has positive value within certain contexts. In a classroom setting ,both students and teachers are caught in the conflicting social ambiguities associated with these varieties and the movement between them: propriety vs. impropriety, decorum vs. freedom and licence, of control vs. the fear of lack of control which is sometimes associated with the Creole vernacular. Grammatical features and attitudes to these varieties are described by Winford James, a Caribbean Creole linguist.

Reading may be viewed as a transaction with texts. While engaged in this act, students are processing language using "the strategies for creating meaning out of their experience." (Lytle and Botel,1990). Our young people read and communicate within a "mesh" of tensions, linguistic ambiguities, of spontaniety and of constraints which are bound to have an effect on Comprehension. What is needed is a teaching "tool" that will help them to achieve greater Standard English facility without eradicating their spontaniety and "native" communicative strategies. One way of doing this is suggested in "An Alternative Language Experience Guide."

**Q: What is the relationship between these native communicative strategies (that can be extrapolated from talk as this occurs in the community) and the strategies that a reader or listener uses for negotiating text or accessing meaning from text ? What part does their experience with language play in all of this for creole-influenced students? *In other words, our students' community speech styles must in some way affect their negotiation of meaning in a variety of texts. THESE NATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPEAKING CONSTITUTE A PART OF THEIR PRIOR EXPERIENCE OF HOW LANGUAGE WORKS AND HOW THEY VALUE (OR MUST LEARN TO VALUE) LANGUAGE AND MAY ALSO BE AN ELEMENT IN GETTING MEANING FROM TEXT.

TALK AND COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMUNITY: Hymes' model for Communication in the community describes the components of speech as channel, forms of speech, participants, scene, setting, the norms of interaction, norms of interpretation, message form and content, speech genres, the rules and relations of speaking and the functions and purposes of speech in terms of outcomes and goals. One must master these means or styles of speaking in order to be competent socially. This theory of Communication is thirty years old and it is still as fresh and as relevant today as it was then.

The approach to Communication as described above can be summarized . . . in terms of a series of four questions: "1. What are the communicative events, and their components, in a community? 2. What are the relationships among them? 3. What capabilities and states do they have, in general, and in particular events? 4. How do they work? Basic to the series of questions is the distinction between signs and signals and sources of information generally, on the one hand, and what count as messages on the other. . . ; and the notion that the concept of message implies the full range of components present in a communicative event. The concept of a message is taken as implying the sharing (real or imputed) of a code (or codes) in terms of which a message is intelligible to participants, minimally an addressor and addressee, in an event constituted by transmission of the message, and characterized by a channel, a setting or context, a definite form or shape in the message, and a topic or comment." (Cagle, 2006)

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER TRAINING: If the ideas above have helped you to discover something new about yourself in a classroom setting –about how you interact with students and colleagues and in what ways school is a sociolinguistic microcosm of the community, then you are on your way to becoming (1) a teacher-researcher in your own school and (2) to seeing how you can share with colleagues about your students' language and Literacy development. We should have more teacher-researchers in Trinidad and Tobago classrooms. Or at least teachers with the habit of journalling about their experiences in teaching and learning. You may have tried something new in this field–Language, Literacy and Communication. Or you may be doing something unique which you think is commonplace, our training also should endorse putting these practices in writing and we becoming "teacher-writers".

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*Communication Definition. Retrieved from www.senate.psu.edu/curriculum_resources/guide/glossary.html

Chapter 2

Improving Literacy through Communication Experiences[1]

MODULE OUTLINE

- The Problem
- Language in Trinidad and Tobago
- Students' views and the relationship between Language and Literacy
- What can a teacher do? Suggestions for using Communication experiences
- Activities
- References

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

1. Read the sections that follow and raise questions on them. 2. You may also suggest additional links or references that other users can explore. 3. How can the section on activities be expanded ? 4. Have you encountered a similar situation in your classroom? Describe it for other users.

THE PROBLEM

This module arose out of observations which the writer made during a Reading-Library project in Princes Town,Trinidad. One of the aims of the project was to explore for ways of teaching Reading and Writing to (creole-influenced) secondary school "problem or struggling readers". Many young people–especially males (age 14+), who are "struggling readers" leave the secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago and are unable to communicate competently in speech and writing in International English. The project accommodated 50 students over a two year period. More than half were males(15+-17 years) from the Technical-Vocational Department of the school(Matilda Senior Secondary). They attended weekly 2-hour sessions in an after- school setting. Students were required to visit the Princes Town Public Library as a group for two to three hours a week to learn library skills.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The project students were of Indo and African descent. They came from rural homes in the Princes Town-Moruga-New Grant area in South Trinidad.(See the map of Trinidad in the Links section.) Parents were mainly gardeners, skilled workers and labourers. In Matilda Senior Secondary, there were approximately 1000+ students and 100+ teachers. The students were prepared over a two-year period for the "sophisticated" Caribbean Examinations Council exams in academic and technical-vocational subjects. Reading some of the textbooks in this area was a students' nightmare.

During these sessions we (the tutors) attempted to build the "traditional" Language-experience shared/group stories using the students Creole-type English. Even though we explained to them why we were doing this, a small crisis occurred. A group of students objected "vociferously" to the use of Trinidadian

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m14074/1.32/>.

Creole English to form the stories for their reading material. Of the 50 students, 75% of them preferred to use Standard/International English for their stories. The objection was so fierce (creole being referred to as "DAT"–that language) that the writing /composition of stories in Creole had to be abandoned. Instead , through informal interviews (chats) and classroom observations, the writer gained more insight into how the young people felt and thought about their Language. She thought of this as comprising their own unique "experience" i.e how they "saw" themselves communicating and using Language in their community. She attempted to use this to help them interact with and produce English texts in a meaningful way. What follows in the sections BELOW are suggestions for an approach to developing materials based on the students' communicative experience.

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Winford James, a Caribbean Creole linguist has discussed in non-technical terms the crisis that exists in language use and communication in Trinidad and Tobago's classrooms today (see Links). This situation arises because Creole English is still regarded as a "broken" and "corrupt" form of English. He has also listed grammatical features of Trinidad and Tobago Creole English. Standard/International English is the language of upward social mobility, and of education. It is the language of success. The crisis deepens when one realizes that students' ability to understand spoken English far outweighs their ability to produce this in speech or writing, or for many students to read and understand texts written in English.

Many gifted speakers e.g. pastors, politicians and teachers can switch glibly between the two 'codes' when the occasion, hearers and purposes of speech require this. (Author's question: Is this a sign of "giftedness" which we have not yet recognized or capitalized on?) What is needed is an approach that will allow teachers to reflect on how they use language with creole-influenced students and for the latter to explore in a positive fashion the creative uses of Creole English.

Example 2.1

A SLICE FROM A GROUP INTERVIEW

The question for group discussion was: "How you feel about 'Trini talk' (Creole dialect)?" Here are some responses: Bill: "...is something I accept." Jarod: "Vulgar talk. I prefer polite language." Teacher: "What is polite language?" Lisa: "They speak that in Standard English." J: ...like when you talking to a girl. You don't talk harsh or obscene or ignorant." In the group's view the opposite of "talking polite" is "obscene". They agreed that Creole speech was not primarily for obscene purposes. It happens that way in the community.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Dell Hymes(1972) saidwhat we need to know about Language in the classroom is "the relationship between a grammar of English and the ways in which English is organized in use by teachers, students and the communities" they come from; the meaning of features ... such as intonation, tone, rhythm and style; the range of 'means of speech'..."conveying respect or disrespect, concern or indifference, intimacy or distance, seriousness or play...the appropriateness of different ways of speaking to different topics, speakers and situations." Ethnography is the recommended research method to uncover these "means".(in Cazden et al. pp xi-lvi.) During my informal chats with students, they "voluntarily" spoke about their language in this fashion–not in terms of grammatical structures, but in terms of "ways" that conveyed respect or disrespect, intimacy or distance, seriousness or play. Below are some points they made about Language and their earlier Literacy-learning.

STUDENT TALK SPECTRUM

At one end of the spectrum is "Polite" speech and at the other end "Ignorant" or disrespectful verbal behaviour. These categories for Language in the community, are those that the students themselves used. ("Polite"_____"Ignorant") In between the two points there are a range of speech acts that make up the spectrum. In the "polite" category the students placed those acts which they thought had "positive" value; in the "ignorant" category, they placed what they thought were negative or "senseless" uses of speech. All of this is as they know it in the community in which they live. They also considered as ranging between the two points, acts such as : Sweet talk or mamaguy, robber talk (bravado) and rude talk. In the two categories of positive and negative speech acts both Standard English and Trinidadian Creole are

used. But the latter is used more frequently for "ignorant", negative talk and this is accompanied by loud, vehement tones.

POLITE TALK: POSITIVE

- Old talk
- Sweet talk–talking in nice tones
- Boasting/Brag, robber talk–hyperbole
- Good talk/getting advice from adults
- Fatigue/picong/tease –insult
- Knowing bounds or limits, so as not to violate a person

IGNORANT TALK: NEGATIVE

- IGNORANT TALK: NEGATIVE
- Back chat or answer back
- Cuss–using obscene language
- Argument–loud talking
- Quarrel
- Mauvais langue, bad talk or gossip
- Rum talk, slack talk, old talk

OLD TALK

It appears that "old talk" for young as well as for older people, occurs in a relaxed environment among a group of friends or acquaintances. There is a freedom to participate here, to listen, to express one's views and to add humour, to perform, to sing, to chant and tell news and tales. Within an old talk session some disrespectful speech can occur. It is necessary to know bounds or limits and not hurt another person with too many "heavy" insults. All of the speech acts listed in the "ignorant" category were regarded by the students as "talking stupidness" and "making noise". The irony is that students(mainly males) admitted that they used obscene and loud violent speech when the occasion arose,to gain advantage over an opponent and to gain "respect" among their peers; although they strongly disapproved of this way of talking. They found it especially distasteful when used by females.

LITERACY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Our students related that they learned Reading at home the hard and painful way, that is ,their lessons were accompanied by "licks" or physical punishment. "Making a mistake" while reading a passage orally is actively discouraged. These unpleasant experiences have a negative impact on students. Some parents may discourage their children from reading for pleasure because the material does not have a textbook format. Reading comics and magazines are discouraged. On the other hand, life is hard economically and parents/guardians cannot afford to buy "story books" for children. It is a struggle just to send them to school to get a certificate. The students' more pleasant Literacy memories were when they were praised by teachers for "doing good work" or for responding well in class.

WHAT A TEACHER CAN DO: SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING MATERIALS

Since the society is one that is rich in oral traditions, and performance (called "playing")occurs naturally even for very young children, educators can make use of these verbal experiences and those expressed by the students, to structure interactions with texts. WHAT IS THE VALUE OF ALL THESE "MEANS" OF SPEECH FOR LITERACY LEARNING? Using mainly the positive elements of talk, and with the relaxation, drama, spontaneity and freedom of participation as in "old talk", they can learn switching behaviors and roles verbally (code-switching). This is important since it will build their linguistic security and confidence. They can also learn the appropriateness of the varieties in use in Trinidad and Tobago. The oral reading of English texts will form a part of this "playing" scenario as in Readers' Theatre. Discussions can take place in the vernacular as well as in English.

STUDENTS USING SPEECH ACTS TO CREATE THEIR OWN MATERIALS

Story telling is an art that can be practised profitably in speech and in writing. Here both Standard English and Trinidadian Creole English can be used. Art and Music are areas where much stimulus material can

be found to enhance presentations. "Knowing bounds or limits" and "Good talk" are themes which will inspire the writing and reading of their own "experiential" material. Teaching reading skills (ESPECIALLY DECODING) within this context should be more enjoyable. Teenaged males are particularly apt at "bragging", boastful or exaggerated speech with its repetitious quality. It is a part of their life style. This can be fine-tuned to capture its value as poetry. Not only this, but "old talk" participatory stances provide a clue for the structure and tone of in-class participation with the teacher controlling noise levels. There is a lot that teachers can do with their peers and their students to create "communication experience" schemes that provide enjoyment, the development of literacy, and strong community values.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

(1) Write down your observations on how your students interact with books and other media. (2)What other "communication events" (e.g. "Good talk", "Knowing Bounds") can you think of as themes for student composition?(JOURNALING) **(3)With a group of your colleagues, compose a skit based on this theme i.e."Knowing Bounds" using code switching.(DRAMA) ** (4)Discuss how student discussions in International English differ from their participation in Creole-type English? (DISCUSSION) **(5)When reading material is based on their "communication" experiences" are they more eager to learn Reading skills than under normal classroom circumstances?(OBSERVATION and DISCUSSION) **(6)Write a piece of "robber talk" with your students and have them perform it. Be sure to use Standard English as well as Creole speech. (DRAMA and CREATIVE WRITING)

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Chapter 3

An alternative Language experience guide for teachers or working with students' experience of their Language[1]

- INSTRUCTIONS on how to use this module:
- Open the files in the Navigation Panel.
- Read the steps in each slide.
- What questions will you raise for discussion?
- Read other related websites or the relevant parts of them.
- Make you own presentation or handout.
- Keep copies of the materials produced by your students.
- Share with others.Start a discussion or write in your blog about the issues.

- Some notes below on:
- Why an initial guide?
- Student awareness of their Language?
- Community ways of speaking
- Roles in communication events
- Creating materials based on these ways of speaking
- Native strategies for talk as "mental means"
- Valuing talk and being selective

**WHY AN INITIAL GUIDE? The approach suggested here will change over time as it is tried and tested by our local teachers. This is the development that we want to achieve.Hence the term "initial". Again the emphasis is on creole-influenced Trinidad and Tobago secondary-school students who have difficulties reading Standard English texts. We recommend the use of this guide for teachers who are themselves speakers of Trinidadian Creole English and who switch back and forth comfortably along the speech continuum from Trinidad Standard to the vernacular. Not a few teachers have an "aversion" for the local creole-type speech of their students. The hope is that this guide (and the related literature) will bring about an appreciation for the appropriate uses of Creole. Also, teachers may be looking too for ways of helping their students to read diffult English texts. This guide offers some suggestions.

*HOW CAN WE FIND OUT ABOUT STUDENT AWARENESS OF THEIR LANGUAGE ? How many of us as teachers take the time during an English Language class, for example,to find out and to record what our students have to say about their knowledge of how they (and other people)use language? In order to

[1]This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m14081/1.25/>.

achieve certain learning goals we have to start with what our students know. You would be surprised how much they know about their language environment and how they see themselves as users of the local varieties. Ask them and they may help us to find new ways to teach about language. You'll find that students are willing to talk about language voluntarily the manner described in the paragraph below.

*WHAT ARE COMMUNITY WAYS OF SPEAKING? HOW IS THIS RELATED TO THE CLASSROOM ? This quotation from Hymes explains how language in the community affects classroom interaction–a quotation on studying language use that is very relevant today as it was when it was published thirty (30) years ago: "For language in the classroom, what we need to know goes far beyond how the grammar of English is organized as something to be taught. It has to do with a relationship between a grammar of English and ways in which English is organized in use by teachers, by children, and by the communities from which they come; with the features of intonation, tone of voice,rhythm, style that escapes the usual grammar and enter into the essential meaning of speech; with the meanings of all those means of speech to those who use them and those who hear them, not in the narrow sense of meaning as naming objects and stating relationships, but in the fuller sense, as conveying respect or disrespect, concern or indifference, intimacy or distance , seriousness or play etc., with the appropriateness of one or another means of speech or way of speaking to one or another topic, person or situation; in short with the structure of language to the structure of speaking." (Hymes, p.xiii)

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNICATION EVENTS? Generally our young people limit their "old-talk" (sharing of news and tales in a relaxed manner in a group) interaction in talk events to their peers. Some adults feel that young people do not know how to "old talk". But the younger people talk about different topics among themselves. There will be a limit then to the topics younger people will share with adults and how they share this. Even in greetings, respect terminology is used with some deference patterns shown towards adults. This has a spill-over effect in the classroom and will affect learning.

*CREATING LITERACY MATERIALS AND "NATIVE STRATEGIES" FOR TALK AS "MENTAL MEANS": These two points were dealt with in the module: "Improving Literacy through Communication Experiences" (see link in the nav. panel). The speech acts themselves provide stimuli that will generate materials. These can be narrative, dramatic, speech, poetic etc. The idea is to let students explore, chat and produce. Native strategies may be the type of "logic" or thinking that a speaker employs during the speech act. The challenge is to collect, document and categorize several examples of talk and matching strategies, and then to align them to Comprehension skills in/of written English text.

*WHY "VALUING" TALK ? Not every speech act is suitable for use in the classroom. It is valuable to understand how your students feel about this and how they can make appropriate and positive use of those acts/ events they have selected. The oral traditions of Trinidad and Tobago can inspire the creation of materials also. *The hope is to find creative ways to teach about Language and Literacy making use of our vast sociolinguistic resources.

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Chapter 4

Writing with Caribbean Teachers: the Reading-Writing Link[1]

4.1 Introduction to this module

This module contains the following sections: Read each one and raise questions that will help to develop it further. * A mindset for writing: Caribbean authors and you * Reading in order to write * Journaling and personal expressive writing * Getting the writing habit and resources for writing This module hopes to answer the need of some young teachers in Trinidad and Tobago to be better writers in order to teach writing. In this regard they asked several questions. The following were among them.

A mindset for writing with Caribbean authors

How can we use our writing skills to help our students to acquire Standard English?" "I left secondary school many years ago so I am a bit 'rusty' do you think it will be hard for me to pick up writing again?" "Can we use readings from Caribbean authors as a starting point for our classes?" "I hope you are the only person who will be reading what I write." The aim is to have teachers see themselves as writers, in order to gain confidence in the act of writing and to link reading to writing. Here is Samuel Selvon, a weaver with words in "My Girl and the City":

"I wooed my girl mostly on her way home from work, and I talked a great deal. Often, it was as if I had never spoken; I heard my words echo in deep caverns of thought, as if they hung about like cigarette smoke in a still room, missionnless; or else they were lost forever in the sounds of the city....In the crowded bus...I shot words over my shoulder, across seats...they found passage between "fares please" and once I got to writing things and pushing my hand over two seats....there was the urgent need to communicate before we parted....All these things I say, I said, waving my hand in the air as if to catch the words floating about me and give them mission"(Nasta and Rutherford, p.96).

One can choose excerpts from the works of other Caribbean authors and become familiar with them. The excerpt above from Samuel Selvon speaks of the magic of using words, of words being given a mission : to woo Selvon's girl, to communicate his feelings with urgency. We too, can weave words into stories, journal entries and poems with the confidence and skill of a Selvon or a Walcott, so giving to our words a mission and a life of their own. We can read our selected excerpts aloud several times a week and jot down notes to ourselves or questions that we might have. While doing this one should discover the mission and the meaning of the author's words. We can roam the landscapes and seascapes they create and be inspired to want to create our own. Q: What have you discovered about the writings of your favourite Caribbean author? You'll want to investigate too the growing body of Caribbean Children's Literature and build your own lists.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m14129/1.43/>.

Reading in order to write

In order to be a writer or to write with some fluency, one should be an avid reader. So many of our young teachers "confessed" that they did not read habitually because they lacked the time to do so. In this information age of well-informed students, we need equally well-informed teachers. It is frightening to think that as teachers we do not read beyond the text and supplementary materials that we use with our classes. It is also frightening to think that writing as a hobby is low on our list of "must-cultivate" priorities when we must also teach students how to write. Reading is linked to writing and many good writers are avid readers. Can we link these two "arts" for our growth and development?

Journaling and personal expressive writing

Keeping a journal and writing personal expressive pieces were a part of the course in Written Communication at the Corinth Teachers College campus (UTT). A few teachers openly stated that did not like writing and whether this was a way of "finding out their business". The answer to such a response was that their pieces do not have to reveal secrets but to express their thoughts and feelings on any topic: to show that they are human. The challenge was "to link" their reading to their writing and to discuss what they found in the writings of authors such as Merle Hodge, Selvon and Jamaica Kincaid. (Q:Can you write like them or better? Have you thought of writing narrative or essays like this?) or even children's stories? Please visit the links in the navigation panel for ideas on how to keep a journal and on the qualities of expressive writing.

Suggestions for linking reading to writing

1. Make brief but "full" selections from the texts/novels of your favourite writers–Caribbean or International. For example, from *Samuel Selvon, *Merle Hodge, *George Lamming, *John Steinbeck, *Paule Marshall, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Earnest Hemmingway or others. 2. Print out your selections and READ them aloud to yourself. You can also tape yourself while reading. Let the selections "simmer" and return to them periodically during the course of the week. Say why you chose these portions of text for your reading. 3. In your private moments begin "playing with" story ideas and topics which you can use for writing personal essays. These ideas may "resemble" those from your favourite author. If the resemblance is too close "work on" them i.e. in a pre-writing fashion rewrite your ideas and topics until you feel they are entirely your own. If you can devise plots for stories and writing topics quite easily, skip this step. 4. Finally begin to write . Your confidence in your talent will grow. Expressions from your favourite authors will even come to you. Perhaps you can try modifying them or creating imagery which resembles that of your favourite author. Your style will evolve over time and with practice. 5. Read back your personal essays or stories, share them and feel good about them.

Need for confidence

Many of our teachers passed through the Cambridge Advanced Level examination system where General Paper, consisting of the writing of two essays, either argumemtative or expository, formed the final exam in writing. While this satisfied an entry requirement for the teaching profession, perhaps it did not encourage developing writing as a hobby or building a lasting interest in reading and writing as a way of life for teachers. Personal expressive writing may be a start towards removing negative thoughts about the writing process. One young teacher admitted: "I'd never be a writer, but the important thing is to overcome negative feelings about writing; in this way I'll better be able to teach students how to write."

What student teachers wrote about

Initially it was difficult for the teachers to get going. They did the thinking and the pre-writing of their pieces in various places– while travelling on the bus, having lunch or in some cases after they put their children to bed. They wrote the personal expressive pieces as journal entries on subjects that ranged from childhood, to being a mother or a father, on relationships, on their being homesick–missing home, on the death of loved ones and even on writers'block.

I noticed that writing in the personal expressive mode increased our teachers' desire to write even though they have not done this kind of writing before. Several of them reported that as they wrote about their personal, private experiences, they felt better about themselves, words and ideas flowed freely from them after a few "false starts". Many were encouraged after reading The Diary of Anne Frank. However, a few wished to share what they wrote only with the tutor since they felt sensitive about their pieces. They were eager to edit their drafts and saw this exercise as valuable in sharpening their writing skills.

Getting the Writing Habit

The following are some suggestions for those who need encouragement in sharpening their writing skills once again: (1) Make the time to read as a hobby. (2) Visit the West Indian/Caribbean fiction shelf of your local library. Have a favourite author. (3) Keep a journal about your thoughts on any topic. (4) Do some personal writing as journal entries and resolve to write often. (5) Join a network of local writers and share your stories if you wish to write for publication. (6) Your students will eventually follow your lead. Explore the sites below. They are web resources that teachers can use to upgrade their skills to get ideas for teaching Writing.

Writing Centers:

*Paradigm Online Writing Assistant, *OWL at Purdue Univ., *Colorado State Writing Center Use your search engine to search for them on the web. http://google.com

Link to Reference List for this article–click here [2]

[2] http://www.freewebs.com/utt140/linkstoliteracycnxorg.htm

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Communication, Language and Literacy in Trinidad and Tobago
This course introduces teachers in Trinidad and Tobago to some possible links between Language, Communication and Literacy in our local contexts. All students and interested persons are welcome to sample the ideas here. Any of the modules/sections can be a convenient starting point.

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