

Focus Group

SuperMao: Battle Royal (Graphic Novel)

Date:	Thursday 2 July 2009
Place:	Victoria University
Participants:	45 (3 classes) English Language Institute (ELI) students from a range of non-English speaking backgrounds
Facilitators:	Fiona Henderson, Christine Mountford
Method:	Discussing and answering questions while looking at the graphic novel

Comments:

- Wow – attractive colourful and eye catching.
- Liked the ping pong theme.
- Eager to read it.
- Lots of text to read.

What is the message – what is it about?

- About table tennis.
- About academic writing (x 3).
- How to write a research report.
- Guides you to writing an assessment.
- Sounds as though everyone makes the same mistakes.
- Addresses common mistakes.
- When the result is not good, it has to be improved and this provides a little bit of information about how to improve.

Relevance of characters used:

- Different people but all with similar problems.
- Recognised some of the characters but not all, i.e. Yeti, Grim Reaper.
- Some did not know any of the characters.
- Does not matter if we don't know who the characters are.

Is there anything offensive?

1. Use of Mao

Students were 50-50 divided regarding the use of Mao. On probing they had no problem with him being used here in Melbourne but thought students in China would be less open minded. More specifically they thought anybody middle aged (over 35!!) would not approve.

- Mao a bit sensitive but not the master of all people.
- Mao is very, very respected.
- Mao playing ping pong is disrespectful.
- China would not like it.
- Some Vietnamese students also said that leaders (any leader) should not be treated disrespectfully.
- Indian students did not like Mao always winning.
- Does not look enough like Mao.
- Don't like heroes made into comics – not respectful.

Suggestions included:

- Make it a more international figure.
- Cover should have a more international figure.
- Create our own VU character.

2. Use of the word 'fool'

At least one person in each class did not like the repeated use of "fool": They saw this as a slight on:

- the character; and on
- their efforts as the real students.

Use of comic:

- 90% in favour of use of comics; 10% thought them an improper vehicle for academic material particularly the Middle Eastern students. Some thought the third row could be used for formal information.
- Three students said that comics were not something they enjoyed / valued / bothered with / engaged with.
- Some comic "experts" thought them too wordy and too much repetition of gestures and facial expressions!!!
- "Yankee" not understood.
- Grim Reaper not understood but did not detract from message.
- Cartoon not clear and confusing; want information in a more formal way (not Chinese students).
- Instead of just having an occasional Chinese translation, why not also have a Vietnamese or Indian?
- Chinese students thought it OK, funny but could have a mix of both text and cartoon.

If each page were linked to a web site with the address on the page would this encourage you to use it?

- Yes.
- One page at a time would be better.