

English Language E01 / E06

Area: Curriculum, Reading

Title: Marrying Reading Strategies and Pleasurable Reading Experiences

**Speakers: Ms CHAN Yeung-ming, Eve (Senior School Development Officer)
Ms KAN Lo-ming, Carol, Ms KONG Suk-man, Sherry
(Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Primary School)**

Introduction

To help their students read, most teachers have successfully integrated various reading strategies into their English language teaching. In some reading lessons, many students have learned from their teachers ways to locate specific information, use contextual clues to find meaning of unknown words, identify reference for pronouns, look for main ideas etc.. In other reading lessons, teachers have provided students with valuable opportunities to learn new vocabulary, phrases, sentence patterns and grammar items. The learning and teaching focuses of these reading lessons are well-justified and necessary. In these reading lessons, undoubtedly, students are equipped with the essential reading skills and language knowledge which are important on their life-long learning journey. However, reading lessons with focuses on reading strategies, grammar and word-level and sentence-level understanding are sometimes rather rigid and uniform.

Teachers in Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Primary School began to ask the question “Are strategy-based lessons and motivating literacy practices always at odds with one another?” Research in young readers has led teachers to have deeper understanding of the relationship between reading strategies and reading motivation. Moser and Morrison (1998, p.234) pointed out, “Although instruction in reading strategies and skills is important, teachers must remember to provide time for students to enjoy good books and have positive reading experiences. This may be especially crucial for those readers who experience difficulty in learning to read.” When looking at the co-relation between intrinsic motivation and reading skills, researchers like Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray and Fuchs (2008) suggested that increasing children’s reading skills as an intervention did not lead to increased motivation for reading. On the other hand, intrinsic reading motivation is most strongly predicted by the engaging and interest level of reading practices. These research findings underpin the strong relationship of pleasurable or engaging reading experience and intrinsic motivation to read.

Teachers’ next questions were: What are motivational reading practices or tasks? How are they implemented in the classroom? Turner and Paris (1995) gave teachers some insights. They found that open tasks, which were reading activities allowing students to have some control over the product and process in daily reading classrooms, are the most reliable indicator of reading motivation. With reference to researchers’ findings and the belief in student-centred pedagogy, teachers in Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Primary School kicked off a new reading curriculum

initiative which has blended reading skills and motivating literacy tasks. The new initiative has the goal of increasing students' engagement with texts and nurturing students' intrinsic reading motivation. High-interest texts, explicit strategy instruction, teachers' modeling of reading and peer collaboration are four important attributes of their KS1 reading lessons. Teachers selected three common text types to work on. They are poems, comics and stories and for each text type, a text set has been developed for the purpose of providing students with sufficient exposure.

Poetry in motion

To let the KS1 students turn passive reading into active engagement, teachers particularly selected poems in which words and patterns flow easily and at the same time, their rhythm and rhyming schemes create naturally a musical reading. Apart from reading aloud the poems, teachers also encouraged students to think of body movements and produce musical instruments to complement the recital process. Numerous research has pointed out the benefits of kinesthetic movements to young learners as these experiences help create hands-on, active, and participatory experiences for children (Jensen, 2001). Movement of the body and limbs enables student dancers, actors and athletes to raise their phonological awareness and learn about the meaning of different poems. In real classrooms, students demonstrated their understanding of the rhythm and rhymes of the language play when students clapped their hands and stomped their feet to support their reading aloud of the poems 'Four Little Puppies' (adapted from Louise Scott *Five Little Puppies*), 'Five for the Morning' (adapted from Tony Mitton *Ten for the Morning*) and 'Here Are My Hands' (adapted from John Archambault *Here Are My Hands*). When students waved their home-made musical instruments made of water bottles, moon cake tins and Yakult bottles to create musical beats, teachers knew that students understood the role of rhythm in poems. Most importantly, teachers witnessed that students were in control of their reading products and process.

In addition to helping students to experience the rhythm of the poems, teachers also led students to have an overall understanding of the meaning of each poem by creating mental images in their minds. Different images used in the content of the poems were re-created when students showed their gestures, displayed props and drew pictures in the reading classrooms. In fact, the poems chosen by the School have served the purposes of helping students to revisit what they had learned in various content areas in KS1 including colours, animals, numbers, body parts and adjectives. Teachers agreed that the poem reading classes were fun, engaging and meaningful to their students.

Comics are not cosmetic

Comics are a text type appealing to young learners because of its simple pictures and humorous ideas. In fact, when teachers of Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Primary School slipped the phrase 'Let's read some comics', students could not hold their excitement. Instantly, they yelled and demanded to read the comics. Authentic comics about Snoopy, the world famous Beagle dog, and Garfield, the naughty cat, were chosen for their relevance to students' life, age-appropriateness and availability.

Although comics may seem childish and cosmetic at first sight, they are highly useful text

types to teach two important reading skills: employing the knowledge of the world and using pictorial clues. In practical classrooms, teachers noticed that filling in students with some background knowledge of the comic characters, such as their hobbies and interests, helped students to predict the development of the comic stories very quickly. In a natural and stress-free way, students in the classrooms showed excellent use of their knowledge of the world to make correct guesses of Garfield's "Favourite Sports". In other lessons on reading Snoopy comic stripes, with teachers' guidance on the intensive study of pictorial clues, students could sequence the development of the comics. Also, the reading of comics went further to incorporate writing. In the task of writing appropriate dialogues for the comics, teachers noticed students have understood the meaningfulness of dialogues in reading comics.

Teachers also found that teaching of comics in classrooms brought a whole new world of reading resources to students. By taking the library's English comic books to the classrooms, teachers enthralled the students to a lot more fun reading.

Hear my stories

A lot of research has pointed out the benefits of teaching short stories to EFL students. By reading short stories, students can gain entrance to a world familiar and unfamiliar to them due to the cultural diversity on top of the linguistic benefited (Erkaya, 2003). In the process of reading short stories, students interact with the culture of the English speaking world in terms of thoughts, feelings, facts, opinions, customs, language, tradition etc..

Facing the situation that most Hong Kong textbooks have not integrated the short story genre sufficiently into the KS1 curriculum, teachers at Hoi Ping Chamber of Commerce Primary School have added values to their school-based curriculum by rewriting some of the textbook materials into short stories and introducing classical English short stories such as *Three Little Pigs*, *Jack and the Beanstalks*, *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Ant and the Grasshopper* into the curriculum.

To help students comprehend the stories, teachers identified and showed the related YouTube cartoon videos with sounds and pictures. The watching of the videos provided students with a full version of the stories and a chance to listen to native speakers telling the stories. After listening and watching the stories, teachers supported their students to understand the literary structure of the stories using story maps which included story elements such as characters, setting and events.

Short stories are usually motivating to students for the fact that students can respond in real life to the stories in the past in the process of reading. Experiencing feelings of the characters is a way of enabling students to have direct interaction with texts (Elliott, 1990). Teachers affirmed researchers' findings through actions in the classroom. Students were given tasks to retell the stories with self-created props, appropriate voices of the characters and a proper tone of a narrator. The task was particularly inviting to emergent readers who were hesitant to read longer texts.

This session aims to share with participants some pleasurable reading activities in three reading genres, namely poems, comics and short stories. All the materials used will be displayed to participants and videos of learning and teaching in the classroom will also be shown. When teachers

took action to incorporate those genres and ideas in the KS1 reading curriculum, they have all agreed to one of the core values of reading: It is less important for the reader to get the meaning of every word exactly right or to be able to use each and every reading skill. It is more important for the student to learn to love reading itself and teachers can play a role in fostering this love of reading in their classrooms. If the student finishes one text and asks for another, you know you have succeeded!

References:

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