

Taking the KS1 Reading Lesson Forward: A Journey of Reading Eric Carle's Books

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Introduction

Over the years, English teachers in primary schools have made relentless efforts into promoting reading. Teaching of reading skills and incorporating various text types into the reading curriculum have been some major strides. Yet, teachers in Chi Hong still found that some students were left behind. With the aim of engaging more students in the reading process or even turning some students to be life-long lovers of reading, the teachers in Chi Hong Primary School have decided to integrate more components into their reading lessons. The new approach aims at involving students to read texts in a more in-depth way as suggested by English Language Education KLA Curriculum Guide 2017 (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). They started with the P2 curriculum and Eric Carle, a renowned American children book writer, has been the prime focus. In the process of teaching Eric Carle's colorful and meaningful books, the teachers have taken on board four new ideas of reading: author study, multimodal texts, reading to learn and values education.

PART 1: The school-based initiatives on reading

Author Study: Eric Carle

Reading of written work by the same author gives students a taste of author study through which students learn about the personal life of an author who writes with specific writing style. While reading three children's books, *The Mixed-up Chameleon*, *The Very Busy Spider* and *The Very Lonely Firefly*, the Chi Hong Primary School teachers introduced to students some brief biographic data of Eric Carle. Being a children's book writer and a great illustrator, Eric Carle has written and drawn over 70 picture books which are loved by children all over the world. The teachers hoped that through the author study, students were able to compare Eric Carle's books to those of other writers. They should be able to realize that Eric Carle's love of animals, choice of words, sentence and paragraph structures and choices of themes are different from Julia Donaldson's (another children book writer that children read in P.3) devotion to rhyming and creativity in character shaping. In fact, this curriculum planning has set sights on creating a tighter attachment between the book and the children which may in turn equip students with a key to entering the English language reading world.

Use of multi-modal texts

The teachers in Chi Hong Primary School understand that children process information from the world using all their senses. The advance of technology, which has turned some of the reading texts from the print-based format to the digital one, has opened up students' senses further to feel the joy of reading. The electronic reading texts provide students with chances to listen, view and respond to images, animations, sounds and graphics. According to Walsh (2006), readers experience a 'textual shift' when processing multimodal texts. Through her analysis, Walsh found that the meaning-making process of reading multimodal texts is different from that of reading print-based texts. The reading of multimodal texts entails 'non-linear and simultaneous processing' (Walsh, 2008). In other words, students can access various kinds of information in the course of reading. In Chi Hong's reading classrooms, the different modes of texts meant different pathways to construct meaning to the students. To the teachers, multi-modal texts meant better accommodation for students' diverse learning styles and higher chance of student engagement in the reading process. In fact, most Eric Carle's books are now put on YouTube. While reading Eric Carle's e-books, the students visualized how meaning was created side-by-side with the printed texts. Multi-modal texts also allowed the students to see real spiders spinning webs, chameleons changing colors and animals glowing under the sea on the screen while they were reading the stories in classrooms. Throughout the course of teaching, the teachers realized that the interplay of print and digital texts supported a more dynamic and coherent learning experience.

Reading to learn

In a bid to extend 'Learning to Read', 'Reading to Learn' is another focus of the renewed English Language Education KLA Curriculum Guide 2017. It states that the school-based English Language curriculum should develop students' skills in 'Reading to Learn' through providing exposure to a wide range of materials with different themes and text types conducive to knowledge building and language teaching (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). The teachers at Chi Hong Primary school are of the opinion that the two concepts 'Learning to Read' and 'Reading to Learn' should be inculcated in students simultaneously and continuously in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In the Chi Hong reading lessons, through the 'Learning to Read' process, students were guided to read with essential reading skills such as prediction and use of pictorial clues and at the same time students 'read to learn' information about special features of different insects and animals. The implicit knowledge in fictional texts was taught and elaborated explicitly for helping students connect concepts and ideas in language and content subjects. As such, the Chi Hong students learned that the spider has different body parts; the chameleon has the ability to camouflage and some sea animals can glow under the deep and dark sea. These elaborations have been considered an important part of 'Reading to Learn' advocated by Rose (2016, P.3) who has defined it as 'Elaborations contain the goal of each learning activity. They may involve teachers giving new knowledge, or a discussion of learners' knowledge, or practice applying new knowledge'. The focuses both on 'Learning to Read' and 'Reading to learn' has opened up the literacy gateway for the Chi Hong students who have the skills to read more and the aspiration

to explore further.

Values education

The renewed English Language Education KLA Curriculum Guide 2017 suggests that the school-based English Language curriculum should strengthen values education for the purpose of whole-person development (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). Schools are encouraged to focus on the seven values and attitudes: perseverance, respect for others, responsibility, national identity, commitment, integrity and care for others. Eric Carle's books are rich of stimuli for deepening students' understanding of these values and attitudes. Protagonists in Eric Carle's stories often experience some revelation because of the values or attitudes they uphold. Through reading the books with a focus on values education, the students in Chi Hong Primary School experienced the feelings and consequences the characters had as the plots develop forward. The teachers used two pedagogical skills in the process of teaching values: 'Concept discussions' and 'Scenarios' (Eyre, R. & Eyre, L, 1993, P.32). Utilizing 'Concept discussions', the teachers explicitly talked about the terms of the values and explained why they are important to students. With the 'Scenarios' strategy, the teachers put children in a situation in which they had to see and feel the consequence of their actions. Instead of giving students formal lessons on values, the teachers let students articulate their thoughts and facilitate their understanding of the implication behind their choices. The teachers also found that students were in a better position to examine their beliefs and attitudes when they were guided to connect their personal life with the characters' experience.

PART 2: Reading Eric Carle's books in classrooms

The Mixed-up Chameleon

The story is about a chameleon who was not quite satisfied with his natural ability to camouflage only. He was jealous of the flamingo that had beautiful feathers. He wanted to be smart like a fox. He wished he could swim like a fish, etc. Then magic happened. The chameleon turned into a monster with all the animal features he wanted to have. Yet, he was in a desperate situation with his new body: he could not feed on flies, the food he liked very much.

While reading the book with students, the teachers reported that the book gave students chances to learn and revise a good range of animal names, ranging from the polar bear, flamingo, seal, fox, to tortoise. The main language pattern in the book 'I wish I could...' sounded challenging to students but its recurrent appearance, together with the support from multi-modal texts and pictorial clues enabled students to understand the meaning of 'the wish'. Students also learned the use of similes from sentences like 'I wish I could run like a deer', 'I wish I could see things far away like a giraffe', 'I wish I could hide in a shell like a turtle'. The teachers developed students' prediction skills when they

had to guess what the chameleon wished to be on different pages and what it could not do when it turned into a monster as they read along.

While reading the book, children learned knowledge about animals which resonances with the content in General Studies- there are animals that can camouflage to protect themselves from predators or to get food. Chameleons are one of these animals. The concept of 'camouflage' was imprinted on the students' mind when they watched a YouTube video showing chameleons change colors in the real world. In terms of values education, through the chameleon's reflection, children were guided to appreciate own strengths and understand that everyone is different. The teachers brought about the message of self-respect with the strategy of 'Concept Discussion' through which students discussed and reflected on the strengths they had.

The Very Busy Spider

The story is about a committed female spider who determined to spin her beautiful web despite all the distractions she faced from different animals. She rejected the horse's invitation to go for a ride, the cow's request for eating some grass together, the goat's begging for having some jumping on rocks and the pig's appeal for having some rolling in the mud. In the end, the spider's endeavor was rewarded by her favorite food: a fly in her newly-built web.

In the process of reading, the teachers noted that the book offered excellent opportunities for students to understand how language such as animal sounds could be used in stories. The students easily connected the 'Oink' sound to pigs; 'Cock-a-doodle do' to roosters; and 'Quack' to ducks as the sounds and the animal pictures were put next to one another in the multi-media text. Additionally, typical animal actions were also taught through the books. For example, students learned: the horse goes for a ride, the pig rolls in the mud and the goat jumps on rocks. At the end of the reading, students could also do a story-map to summarize the different events in the story.

The teachers extended students' learning through teaching some important knowledge of animals: Spiders have body parts. The spider has a head, a spinneret, an abdomen and legs. Since spiders have eight legs but not six legs and thus they are not regarded as insects. Also, in the end of the story about the determined spider, the teachers inculcated in students the need for commitment to achieve a goal. Students were guided to feel the power of determination in the role of the spider through role-play activities in the reading lessons.

The Very Lonely Firefly

The book turns a lonely firefly's journey of looking for friends into an interesting exploration of things that glow at night. The book is an excellent tool for teaching students the reading skill of using pictorial

clues from the cover through to the last page of the book. The Chi Hong students could see the stark contrast of one lonely firefly on the cover and a group of fireflies at the end. The students activated their reading skills of using pictorial clues to learn vocabulary items related to 'glowing', such as lightbulbs, candles and lanterns while reading page by page. The witty arrangement of integrating another layer of story (a group of people going to see a firework display) with the use of pictures further demonstrated to the students that pictures are highly interesting and meaningful when it comes to reading. In terms of language, the book allowed the students to experience the use of simple past tense when they repeatedly read three words 'saw', 'was' and 'flew'. However, the three irregular past tense verbs did not become a huddle of understanding the book with the ample support of pictorial clues and actions.

The book naturally lends itself to a stimulus of arousing students' curiosity to the interesting and special features of animals which are part of the content of the KS 1 General Studies curriculum. The teachers took the students further into the animal world by showing them more multi-model texts with animals which glow at night. On the front of values education, the teachers found that the book could spark students' discussion on ways to make friends. Being situated in a scenario, students could easily come up with a list of activities that they could say and do to show their care for others.

Students' learning environment has changed a lot as a result of the rapid development in technology. Literacy pedagogy may not be the same again. The use of multimodal texts in classrooms is an example. Yet, no matter how teachers approach the teaching of reading, our fundamental job is to foster a love of reading that will last for a life time. In this sharing session, the teachers from Chi Hong Primary School will share their experience of reading Eric Carle's books with their P.2 students. Videos and related learning and teaching materials will be shown to participants.

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