Title: From Collaboration to Empowerment: Fostering interactive learning in Reading across the Curriculum and Self-directed Learning

Speakers:

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Introduction

Reading is the key to unlocking students' potential and enabling them to open up a world of possibilities. To promote and cultivate a culture of reading in school, there are needs to broaden students' knowledge base, help them connect their learning experiences and provide opportunities to apply knowledge and skills developed in different KLAs/subjects (English Language Education Section, 2020). We should identify reading materials with suitable entry points to develop the necessary reading skills for reading text written for general or academic purposes. In the light of promoting Reading across the Curriculum (RaC), there is a need to sharpen students' reading strategies while helping them establish meaningful links between concepts and ideas acquired in English Language and different KLAs (English Language Education Section, 2020). Inherent in RaC is the opportunity for reading for purposes and pleasure. As recommended in the Curriculum Guide on Reading to Learn, the progress from Learning to Read to Reading to Learn is cumulative, rather than linear. That is to say, they can be developed in a parallel fashion even at primary level. To this end, students are encouraged to read text on various themes and disciplines to extend knowledge and broaden perspectives, laying a firm foundation for self-directed learning (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

Self-directed Learning (SDL) is a critical learning to learn skill and attribute. Students are expected to plan, monitor and review their learning with guidance and support from their teachers. They are given opportunities to conduct self- and peer-assessment to evaluate their own learning. Constructivism and the related pedagogical approaches to metacognition and self-directed learning form an important theoretical basis for learning how to learn. Some recent studies have revealed that SDL is critically influenced by learning motivation and high self-efficacy which enhances learning effectiveness (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). In view of that, it is also important for students to develop metacognitive skills and become more aware of their own learning process. In the process, co-construction encourages students to work together to share and make reflection on what they have done, contributing to the building of knowledge. Students are then empowered to generate knowledge, meaning and understanding as they work collaboratively with teachers and peers as well as the wider community.

Fostering an Interactive Learning through Reading across the Curriculum

S.K.H. Mung Yan Primary School is disseminating their interactive classroom practices to develop students' reading strategies, further nurturing them to become 'self-directed learners'. The teachers have developed reading packages for Key Stage 2 students, inclusive of specific reading strategies, self-directed learning and multi-modality (e-learning) in the context where learning is envisaged to foster interactive learning. They are as follows:

Year Level	Content of the Reading Package	Remarks
P4	How to be a Sports Star	Print reading – multi-model text
P4	The Hong Kong Story	Guide map reading – Excursion to HK Museum of History
P4	The Paper Bag Princess	Story reading
P5	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Novel study
P5	Crunchy Crackers	Factual non-fiction text
P5	Newspaper	Authentic reading materials
P5	Webpage	Reading webpage on tourist spots to prepare for the excursion to interview tourist
P5	Interview Tourist (for Outing)	
P6	Helen Keller	Biography reading
P6	Shrek Forever After	Movie – Multi-model text

To use a range of reading strategies to understand the different text types in RaC, teachers have worked out strategies that include scanning for specific information, skimming for gist, sequencing events, identifying the main ideas, making inferences, predicting the likely development of the text, understanding the connection between ideas by identifying a range of cohesive devices, and predicting the meaning of unfamiliar words by using picture cues and contextual clues. Explicit teaching of these reading strategies is done with the print, authentic

and web-based reading materials, composing of diverse resources on a specific genre or text-type. The reading packages offer reading at different levels of input (genre-based reading) and output (expected learning outcomes) where teachers can cater for learner diversity.

Students have been encouraged to draw upon their prior knowledge, learning experiences and world knowledge to gain an in-depth understanding of a text to construct meaning. Information technology is used to foster interactive and self-directed learning in multi-literacy learning and teaching. Supported reading is employed as an effective strategy to help students practise learning to read and experience reading to learn at the same time. Students read, talk and think their way through a text. In the learning process, they have developed their awareness of the style structures and organization of particular text types. They are guided to think critically about what they read.

Take the example of the excursion to Tsim Sha Tsui to interview tourists, students' learning experiences are connected from print and authentic reading to web-based reading which includes:

- Knowledge and skills learnt from English Language – how to read information from webpages on Hong Kong tourist spot
- Knowledge and skills learnt from General Studies – different places for food and shopping in Hong Kong

Teachers capitalized on the existing reading programme and collaborate with teachers of General Studies and Chinese on similar themes or topics to help students establish the links to connect learning experiences and broaden their knowledge. In the pre-task preparation, relevant books for intensive reading were used to develop different reading strategies. In the while-task activities, students were actively engaged in relating their learning experiences and applying their knowledge and skills to the following:

- Making connection to personal experience;
- Making connection to school learning experiences; and
- Making connection to global issues.

To prepare students for the excursion, they learned how to search for information on the webpage. The text features and language structures of webpage were explicitly taught to students. Students had to apply the reading strategies of scanning and skimming for information including the Header, Search Box and Navigation Bar as well as interpreting the meaning of unfamiliar words with pictorial and contextual clues. Students then worked in group to work out what they asked when interviewing the tourists. Teachers found that students could do well in scanning for specific information and understanding the connection between ideas with cohesive devices. But there is room for improvement in skimming for gist, identifying the main area and making inferences.

Facilitating Students to be Self-directed Learners

In an information-intensive environment, students need to develop SDL skills that enable them to develop an ever-growing capacity to learn, make sense of new information, construct knowledge, work with others and realise their potential (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). With the support from teachers, students can optimise their learning to be engaged in purposeful collaboration and exploration with peers, contributing to meaningful learning. To become self-directed learners, students are encouraged to:

- set learning goals and plans;
- collaborate with peers;
- contribute to the design of learning activities; and
- connect and apply knowledge and skills in real-life context.

Using the example of the excursion to Tsim Sha Tsui to interview tourists, collaborative learning was promoted in group work, allowing students to work out the questions to ask tourists as well as collaborate together in the process of interviewing.

During the learning process, the group work provided context for interactive learning and offered opportunities for students to express their views, discuss ideas, learn from one another, develop confidence, and generate new insights. Moreover, students had to solve the problem of using communication skills when interviewing tourists. Teachers have provided learning opportunities for students to apply metacognitive strategies to solve the problems. For example, students had to think aloud and model the thinking process in class with teachers demonstrating the thinking process using questions and responsive clues. After the interview, students had to complete a report individually to make reflection on what they did during the interview and evaluate how they performed. All in all, teachers give feedback to students on how to make progress towards challenging learning goals in future. It is evident that the learning is critically influenced by learning motivation and high self-efficacy. Students enjoyed the process of excursion.

The use of metacognitive strategies is enhanced when teachers have been trying to provide opportunities for students to set the learning goals (e.g. where to go for and whom the tourists are to be interviewed), monitor (work out the questions and peer evaluate its appropriateness with teacher support), and evaluate their learning task (how successful is the interview) using a KWL chart and writing a report for a final touch up so that students can become self-directed learners.

Concluding Remarks

The concerted efforts of teachers had sustained and deepened students' accomplishments in enriching their learning experiences and making connection to their knowledge and skills in personal experience, school learning experienced and global issues. Teachers have nurtured students with a sense of self-awareness of their strengths and abilities and they have taken responsibilities for their learning. Moreover, students are developing an ever-growing learning capacity that supports them to become lifelong and self-directed learners to make sense of new information and construct knowledge to realise their potential.

References:

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