Reaping Multiple Benefits through Promoting Reading across the Curriculum in the Primary English Classroom

"Reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status."
(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

Inspiring students to love reading and to develop into avid readers is perhaps one of the greatest missions of all English Language teachers. Different studies have shown that students who enjoy reading and read regularly reap various benefits. Yet, research has also shown that motivation to read decreases with age. This is especially true to students who move from primary to secondary school and have to cope with the increasing academic and English demands because of the possible change of medium of instruction in various subjects. To sustain students' interest in reading and equip them with the skills for academic success, reading across the curriculum (RaC) seems to be the best remedy. RaC aims to sharpen students' reading strategies while helping them establish meaningful **links between concepts and ideas** acquired in different Key Learning Areas (KLA). Inherent in RaC is the opportunity for **reading for purpose** (whether it is for information or research) and **pleasure**. English Language teachers can introduce books with a wide variety of interesting topics related to different KLAs to spice up their lessons, develop their students' reading strategies and connect their learning experiences.

Connecting Learning Experiences

Developing Reading Strategies

RaC
Links between ELE and the other KLAs

Broadening Knowledge

Enhancing Awareness of Academic English

While a thematic approach is often used as an entry point for promoting RaC, considerations could also be given to the following:

Text Types

- Expository text
- Biography
- Information report
- …

Rhetorical Functions & Language Items

- Using the simple present tense to present facts
- Using sequence markers to illustrate steps
- Using 'both' & 'neither' to make comparisons
- …

Text Features

- Using graphs to illustrate trends
- Using headings and subheadings to organise information and ideas
- Using bullet points to provide more details
- …

Pathway to Successful Implementation of RaC

The road map below shows how RaC can be promoted at class or school levels.

START — The RaC Journey

01 Identify the needs of students, take into consideration the school development plan and decide on who to involve:
- teachers within the English panel and/or from other departments
- students within the same level or of all levels.

02 Make a plan with due consideration on the following:
- objectives
- roles of teachers/different departments
- timeline
- learning outcomes.

03 Decide on an entry point (e.g. theme/topic, rhetorical function, text type) and select high-interest books, preferably with the help of the teacher librarian or with reference to the EDB's RaC booklists/catalogue of Hong Kong Public Libraries . The chosen books, be they in print or non-print form (e.g. BookFlix), should contain the content/target features that align with the learning objectives.

(EDB's RaC booklists)   (BookFlix)

04 Design learning materials and activities that help develop students' understanding of the selected topic, rhetorical function or text type.

05 Introduce the topic, the related concepts and text features in lessons of content subjects.

06 Develop reading skills and strategies necessary for understanding and analysing the target language items, text features and text types in English lessons and prepare students for a smooth interface from KS2 to KS3. Go through part of the chosen book(s) with students to spark their interest in the topic. Encourage them to read the remaining parts or other books of the same theme/series in their spare time in groups or independently.

07 Leverage the support from the school library to organise reading activities such as book talks and book displays on the related topic/theme/series. Make use of the Promotion of Reading Grant if funds are needed.

(Promotion of Reading Grant)

08 To promote RaC at the school level, make it the "talk of the school", e.g. sharing reading experience in the morning assembly, setting up a reading wall, organising cross-curricular reading activities in whole school events such as STEM Fair, English Day and Cultural Week. These activities can come in different shapes and sizes, ranging from quizzes and book crossing to readathon.
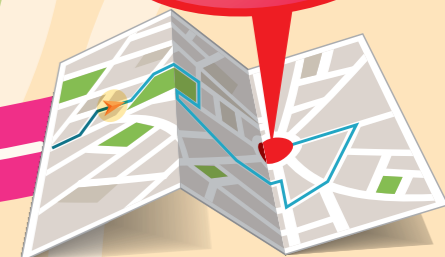
09 Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of RaC and see whether the objectives set have been achieved. Make suggestions that inform successful implementation in the future.

Implementing RaC

Ask the Expert

Here are some questions about RaC that may pop up in your mind. Dr Simon Chan, a lecturer of the University of Hong Kong, is going to share with us his expertise in RaC.

1. *What is the role of English Language teachers in promoting RaC?*

Language is never divorced from meaning in English learning. RaC provides different contexts and interesting content for the development of reading strategies and thinking skills. English Language teachers can work on their own by **integrating RaC into the Reading Workshops**. They can choose reading materials on various topics related to different KLAs and design meaningful tasks to develop such skills as making predictions and inferences, summarising and using graphic organisers for comparing, synthesising and evaluating information and ideas. English Language teachers can also **work with teachers of other KLAs** and synergise their efforts in further enhancing students' reading skills and understanding of the chosen topic/theme.

2. *As an English Language teacher, am I expected to teach the content of another subject when implementing RaC?*

In RaC lessons, there should be both language and content objectives. However, RaC activities in the English lessons should target the **application and integration of the knowledge and skills acquired** and the **development of reading strategies** rather than "re-teaching" such knowledge.

3. *What types of books/texts should be used for promoting RaC?*

To make topics relatable and skills transferable, teachers can use "**paired texts**", which are texts conceptually related in some way, for example, topic, theme, or text type. Teachers are also encouraged to use **information books** because they give a lot of food for thought and room for discussion. Information books are organised in different ways, using **rhetorical functions** that range from "compare and contrast" and "cause and effect" to "problem and solution". **Text features** such as headings, captions, diagrams and charts are used in these books to orientate and support the reader. Good understanding of these functions and features enables students to cope with the academic and English demands from various subjects when they are promoted to secondary schools.

Let's paint like Van Gogh.

4. *Could you suggest some teaching ideas to connect students' learning experiences and promote RaC?*

- Students can read a short biography of Van Gogh to understand more about his life, the language for describing a person's life in chronological order, and vocabulary about drawings. Visual Arts teachers can introduce the works of Van Gogh and invite students to create an artwork imitating Van Gogh's style.

The Biography of Van Gogh

- English and Chinese teachers can guide students to develop a common set of reading strategies respectively using texts of different genres in both languages.

Adopting a Planning-Implementation-Evaluation (PIE) Approach to Promoting RaC at Primary 4

• Queen Elizabeth School Old Students' Association Branch Primary School •

In this school case, RaC was implemented mainly *within the English panel* in the Reading Workshops with the input from General Studies (GS) teachers.

Topic: Wonderful Water

Curriculum mapping: identify the entry point of the RaC unit by finding out the common teaching points in terms of topics, text types, language or thinking skills
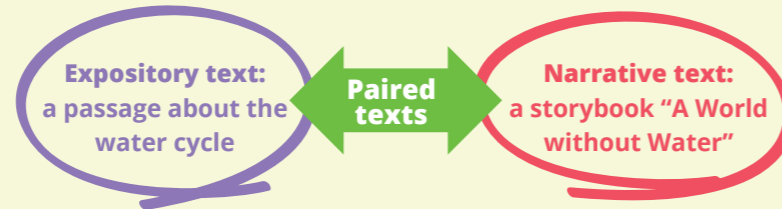
Common teaching points:

Content
- Water rationing
- 3 forms of water
- Uses of water
- Ways to conserve water

Text type
- Flowcharts

Skills development
- Problem-solving

Expository text: a passage about the water cycle ⟷ **Paired texts** ⟷ Narrative text: a storybook "A World without Water"

Paired texts, which are thematically related texts but of different text types, are used to deepen students' understanding of the issue and develop different reading strategies.

Set learning objectives

- To be active readers through developing a variety of reading skills and strategies (e.g. identifying main ideas, locating specific information by using knowledge of text features)
- To learn about the language items (e.g. using the simple present tense to present facts) and vocabulary to describe the water cycle and uses of water
- To develop an understanding of the rhetorical function "problem and solution" and discuss ways to save water
- To connect reading with writing (generating writing ideas from reading texts and activities)
- To develop positive values and attitudes (i.e. understanding the importance of water conservation)
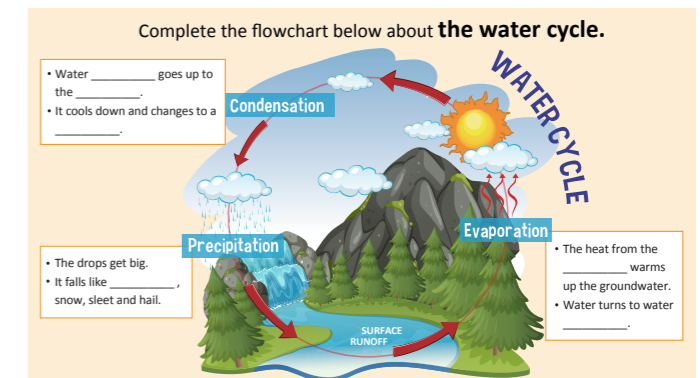
Planning — Implementation — Evaluation

Evaluate the effectiveness and identify areas for improvement to inform planning and implementation in the next cycle.

- ☑ Is there alignment between the learning objectives and learning activities so that the intended learning outcomes are achieved?
- ☑ Can you identify some effective strategies which help enhance students' language skills and promote RaC?
- ☑ Are students more motivated and confident in participating in the learning activities in the RaC unit than usual?
- ☑ Are students' learning experiences in different KLAs well connected?
- ☑ How can the collaboration between KLAs be further improved?

Set focus questions to provide students with a clear reading purpose.
Design learning and teaching activities that provide students with opportunities to connect their learning experiences and apply the knowledge and skills learnt.

Focus Question 1: Is water important to us?

Complete the flowchart below about **the water cycle.**

a) Making connection with the learning experience in GS through reading an article about the cause and effect of water shortage in Hong Kong in the 1960s

b) Guiding students to read an expository text on the water cycle and helping students visualise the text by using a flowchart to illustrate the different stages of the water cycle

Focus Question 2: What do we use water for?

c) Conducting shared reading with students on the narrative text "A World without Water" and guiding students to use pictorial and contextual clues to predict the content of the story and understand the meaning of new words
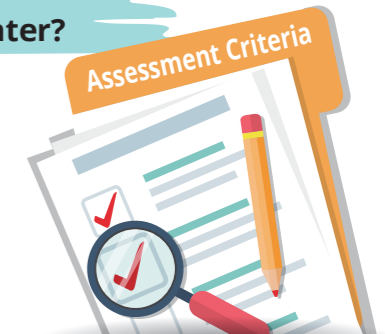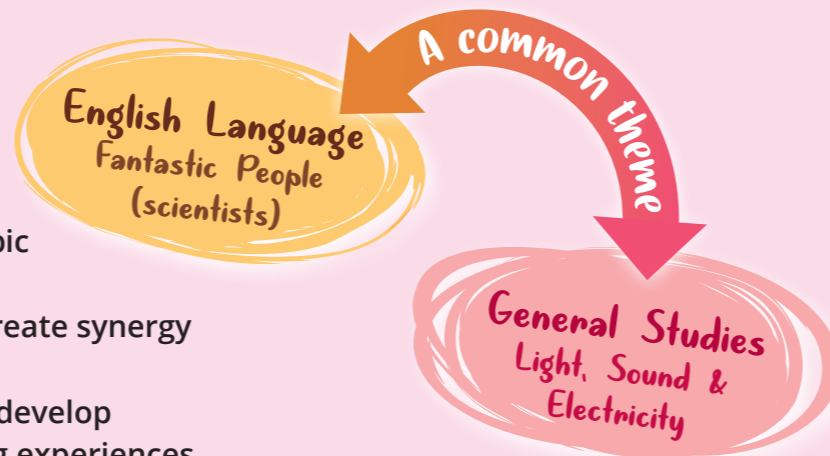
Focus Question 3: How can we save water?

Assessment Criteria

d) Conducting a speaking activity in groups to generate ideas about how people can save water in everyday life

e) Responding to the experience of the characters in the story by rewriting the ending and providing tips on ways to save water

f) Inviting GS teachers to assess the content of the writing

Reading for Pleasure and Purpose:
Engaging Students in Science Experiments through Promoting RaC at Primary 5
• Aberdeen St Peter's Catholic Primary School •

In this school case, **English teachers** and **General Studies (GS) teachers** joined hands to implement RaC through fun-filled hands-on activities.

English & GS teachers:

- Identify themes for collaboration
- Select a unit for conducting the RaC tryout
- Understand students' prior knowledge on the topic
- Identify suitable reading materials
- Agree on the sequence of the tryout periods to create synergy
- Set learning objectives
- Design learning and teaching activities that help develop students' literacy skills and connect their learning experiences

A common theme

English Language
Fantastic People
(scientists)

General Studies
Light, Sound &
Electricity

General Studies teachers:

- Introduce the unit on "Light, Sound & Electricity" before the English unit on "Fantastic People"
- Provide opportunities for students to understand science phenomena through observations, analysing data and drawing conclusions
- Engage students in an experiment on friction by adopting the same investigation steps introduced in the information book "I Can Prove It! Investigating Science" in the English lessons

Engaging students in hands-on learning activities in GS lessons, which would help them understand the scientific investigation steps and enjoy the learning experience
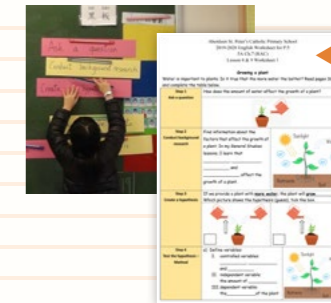
English teachers:

- Raise students' awareness of the features of timelines and biographies
- Design worksheets to illustrate the steps of investigating science logically
- Design level appropriate learning activities for students to formulate questions, analyse data and draw conclusions
- Develop students' reading strategies

Modelling strategies to understand unfamiliar words, e.g. using pictorial clues, glossary and contextual clues through think-aloud

Using a KWL chart to activate students' prior knowledge about scientific investigations in GS lessons and helping them reflect on their learning experience

Helping students take notes and organise ideas on the growth of a plant in order to understand the steps of investigating science from the information book

Extended learning activities in the English lessons to provide opportunities for students to integrate and apply knowledge and skills acquired in both GS and English lessons

- Connect students' reading and writing experiences and support students to write a biography about the scientist they admire
- Guide students to do a gummy bear experiment and apply the science investigation steps
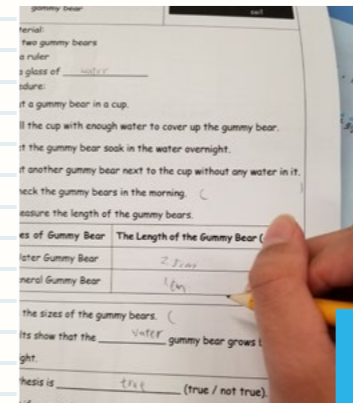- Support students in completing a laboratory report

Conducting a picture walk to help students understand the main ideas of each chapter

Guiding students to scan for useful information on a webpage about a famous scientist by referring to the headings and sub-headings

The gummy bear experiment was pleasurable and inspiring to students, as they could apply the scientific investigation steps in daily life situations.