Title: Our Rewarding Journey of Promoting Reading and Reading across the Curriculum

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Introduction

Reading is important for children, as it is the foundation of lifelong learning and success. UNESCO points out that reading is a significant factor affecting children's future educational and economic opportunities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2007). Research also shows that 'children who do not learn to read in the early grades risk falling further and further behind in later ones, as they cannot absorb printed information, follow written instructions, or communicate well in writing' (Gove & Wetterberg, 2011, p. 1). It is thus of pivotal importance to help students develop their reading abilities as soon as they embark on their learning journeys.

To equip students for success in life, schools in Hong Kong have been attaching a great deal of importance to reading and have been helping students progress from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. Building on the strengths and achievements of existing literacy initiatives, schools are encouraged to enrich English language teaching and learning through promoting Reading across the Curriculum (RaC); and *Reading to Learn: Towards Reading across the Curriculum* is one of the renewed Four Key Tasks in the updated version of the English Language Education Key Learning Area (KLA) Curriculum Guide (Primary 1- Secondary 3) (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). According to the updated Curriculum Guide, RaC 'provides opportunities for students to develop a wide range of reading skills, extend learning of the content and connect their learning experiences across KLAs' (Curriculum Development Council, 2017, p. 47). It can also 'broaden students' knowledge base, help them to connect their learning experiences and provide opportunities for integrating and applying knowledge and skills developed in different KLAs/subjects' (Curriculum Development Council, 2017, p. 9). The English teachers of Asbury Methodist Primary School acknowledge the importance of RaC. In 2018, with the support of their principal, they applied for the Grant Scheme on Promoting Effective English Language Learning in Primary Schools (PEEGS) to develop their school-based curriculum, thereby embarking on a journey of promoting reading and RaC.

School and Project Background

Asbury Methodist Primary School's students are mainly from neighbouring estates, and there is room for improvement in their reading habits and motivation to read. The school's English teachers have always wanted to help students cultivate a reading habit and expose them to a wider variety of books and text types. After the school successfully applied for the PEEGS in 2018, the English Chairperson formed a core team with two enthusiastic English teachers who were subsequently released from some of their teaching duties in order to develop a reading programme to promote RaC from Primary 4 to Primary 6 (P.4-P.6). While the members of the core group were planning and implementing RaC, they were also collaborating with the School-Based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section in developing the P.4 and P.5 curricula. Therefore, the core team members decided to develop RaC modules and integrate them into their school-based curriculum.

The core team hoped that revamping the curriculum to promote RaC would increase students' opportunities for integrating and applying knowledge and skills developed in different KLAs/subjects. In providing these opportunities, teachers could help students connect their learning experiences, broaden their knowledge base, deepen their understanding of the chosen topics and themes and enhance their reading skills.

The Curriculum Planning Process

The core team undertook a detailed curriculum planning process that resulted in the development of curriculum plans, lesson plans and learning and teaching materials (Figure 1).
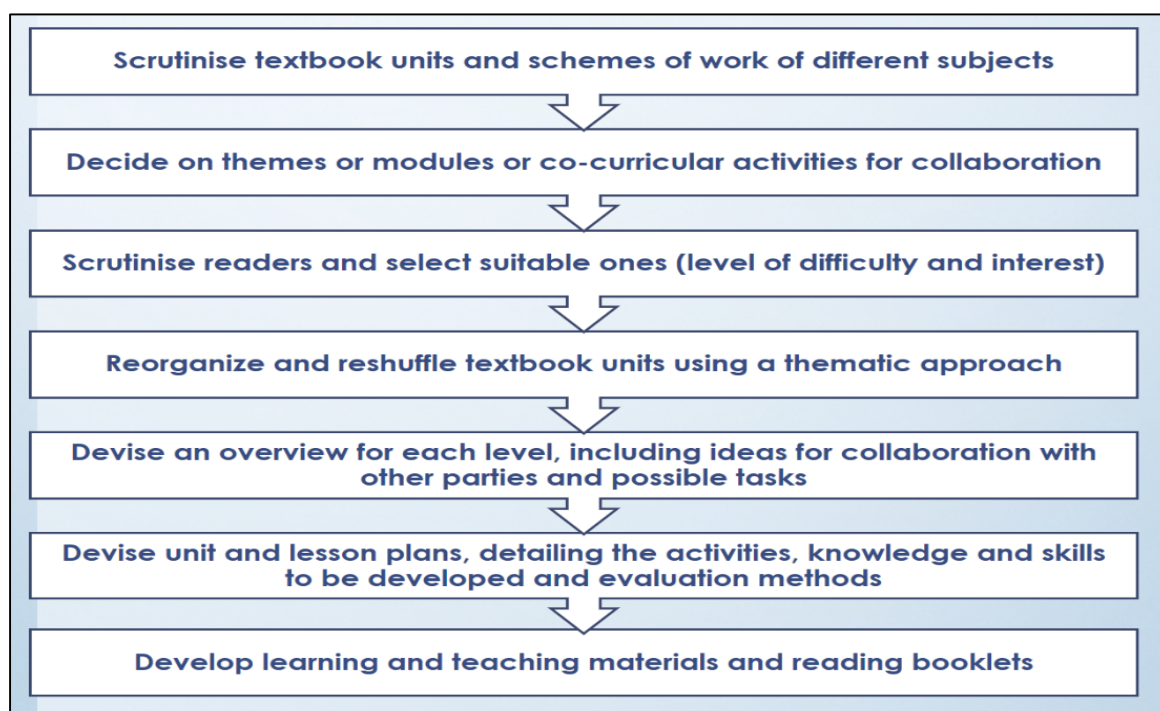

Figure 1: The curriculum planning process

First, the core team scrutinised the textbook units and work schemes of different subjects to identify possible themes or modules for developing RaC modules. A number of questions were used to guide them through this selection process:

1. Which unit or module in the General English (G.E.) Programme they should choose;
2. What kind of reader they should purchase and use;
3. Which subject or co-curricular activity could be matched with the chosen theme;
4. What reading skills could be developed;
5. What kind of support the library could offer;
6. What e-learning tools could be integrated; and
7. What tasks could be developed to facilitate students' learning.

Through repeated discussion and contemplation, the core team was able to decide on the themes and modules for collaboration with different parties. They decided to develop four modules per level, from P.4 to P.6. Among these twelve modules, cross-curricular links were established between English and General Studies, Chinese, Values Education, Mathematics and co-curricular activities such as a school outing. After deciding on the themes and modules to work on, the core team scrutinised the readers available on the market and selected ones that they deemed suitable in terms of their level of difficulty and students' interests. To strike a balance between students' interests and their actual language learning needs, they decided to choose three non-fiction books and one fiction reader at each level.

In order for English teachers to be able to collaborate with teachers in other KLAs, the core team reorganised the textbook units in the G.E. Programme to match the English teaching schedules with those of the other subject modules and with the arrangement of co-curricular activities using a thematic approach, as they found it easier for English to make adjustments to the teaching schedule. To cite P.5 as an example, with a view to matching with the teaching schedules of the *China* module in General Studies and the *Basketball Star Yao Ming* module in Chinese, the core team changed the teaching schedule so as to have English teachers teach Units 4, 5 and 1 at the beginning of the school year; they developed an RaC module on *Cultures* by combining Units 4, 5 and 1 with a reader about China, followed by Units 2 and 3 with a reader about Helen Keller, thereby forming another RaC module on *Famous People*.

After all the modules were reorganised, the core team members co-planned and devised an overview of the RaC modules for each level by including ideas for collaboration with different parties on the following topics:

1. Units and readers in English to be involved;
2. Specific reading skills to be developed;

3. Modules of other KLAs or co-curricular activities to be matched with the unit(s) in English;

4. E-learning tools to be used (e.g. Kahoot), multi-modal texts and tasks in which students must engage in English lessons;

5. Support and activities to be offered and organized by the library; and

6. Tasks and activities to be developed in various lessons.

Figure 2 shows an example of an overview of the RaC modules in P.5. Based on the overviews, the core team developed unit plans, lesson plans and evaluation methods for all the RaC modules from P.4 to P.6 through collaborative lesson planning. These plans would help ensure the sustainability of the RaC modules. Since the core team had to plan in detail what reading skills to teach in each RaC module, they took this opportunity to revamp the reading curriculum in the G.E. Programme as well. They reorganised the teaching of reading skills from P.4 to P.6 and place emphasis on a range of reading skills in different units and readers, such as identifying main ideas and making inferences. The renewed reading curriculum was a by-product of the core team's collaboration on the RaC initiative, an unexpected reward of this journey.

Module	Cultures	Famous people	Food and drink	Changes
G.E. Program	5A Unit 1, Unit 4 - Chinese culture day	5A Unit 3 - People we admire	5A Unit 6 - Healthy eating	5B Unit 3 - I have changed
Reader	China (non-fiction)	Helen Keller (non-fiction)	Healthy eating: Help yourself to health (non-fict.)	Carla Crocodile tries something new (fiction)
Reading skills	- Locate info from contents page - Identify details that support main ideas	- Locate info from book cover - Sequence events - Locate specific info - Follow pronoun references	- Locate specific info and make predictions - Locate info in charts - Follow pronoun references	- Follow pronoun references - Make inferences
Cross-curricular links	常識科 【第5冊】 1. 祖國的地理 2. 中國的氣候和農業 3. 中華兒女 Chinese Culture Day	中文科 五上【第2冊】 單元五 15. 籃球明星姚明 Text structure (Biographical text) Rhetorical function (sequencing)	常識科 【第1冊】 1. 青春期的飲食	Values education: how to face changes and failures in life
E-learning	Kahoot Multi-modal texts	Prezi Multi-modal texts		Kahoot
Library Support	Books related to Chinese culture	Books related to famous people	Books related to leading a healthy lifestyle	Books related to changes and growing up
Task	English lessons: • Write a comparison essay • Write riddles Chinese Culture Day: • Engage in Kahoot games related to Chinese culture	Library lessons: • Vote for the most influential famous person Chinese lessons: • Write an essay about a person I respect English lessons: • Write a speech about a person I admire	English lessons: • Design a poster to promote healthy eating	English lessons: • Write a diary from the perspective of a character from the story

Figure 2: Example of an overview in P.5

Finally, the core team designed learning and teaching materials and reading booklets to develop students' reading skills and reinforce their ability to integrate the knowledge, skills and learning experiences gained from different KLAs. There is a total of twelve reading booklets. With the school principal's support, the team was able to print colour copies of the reading booklets, which successfully attracted students' attention and increased their interest in learning.

Promoting RaC through Making Meaningful Connections

When it comes to promoting RaC, there are different entry points. Apart from using a thematic approach to connecting English and other subjects, the core team tried to use different entry points, such as reading strategies, rhetorical functions and text structure, to establish links between concepts and ideas acquired from different KLAs. Below are some examples of RaC modules that were tried out by teachers in the school. The examples also show how e-learning, multi-modal texts, library books and co-curricular activities come into play in promoting RaC.

Example Module 1: Making Meaningful Links between English, General Studies, and a Life-Wide Learning Activity to Provide Coherent Learning Experiences

In this RaC module on *Hong Kong* in P.4, cross-curricular links were established through matching a module in the G.E. Programme with a module in General Studies and a life-wide learning activity, as well as a reader about living in Hong Kong.

The learning focuses of the module in General Studies were to understand the history of Hong Kong and to develop skills related to studying history. In General Studies lessons, students learned about the history of Hong Kong, such as the city's developments across different periods, and about the differences between the living conditions of the past and present. Students also learned to read facts about the development of Hong Kong. After students learned about Hong Kong in General Studies, English teachers connected their learning experiences through the G.E. Programme as well as the reader concerned with famous places in Hong Kong and past and present facts about the city. They used the reader to broaden students' knowledge, as it touched on geographical information about Hong Kong; for example, the reader explained that there were many tall buildings in Hong Kong due to a lack of flat land. The English teachers also guided students in developing the reading skills required for determining the gist of a text by helping them determine what different pages discussed; and for locating specific information by scanning the text for general comprehension about Hong Kong.

To connect students' learning between the reader and the G.E. Programme, English teachers had students revisit the target language items of the G.E. Programme, such as comparatives and superlatives, when conducting the Reading Workshop. To further deepen students' understanding of

famous places in Hong Kong, English teachers included additional texts containing interesting facts about sites such as the clock tower and the LegCo Complex. During the implementation of this module, the school's library provided books related to Hong Kong. The teacher-librarian also recommended interesting books to broaden and deepen students' knowledge of the subject.

Since students seldom left their communities and lacked real-life experiences, a life-wide activity was subsequently organised for students to tour some of the famous places they had read about in different lessons such as, the Peak and the Clock Tower. A school tour booklet was developed, and students had to accomplish a range of tasks during the tour, such as jotting down notes about their visits and completing an itinerary. After the school outing, English teachers taught students how to introduce a famous place in Hong Kong by using a hamburger organiser – a tool that helped students identify the three key parts of a text: topic sentence, supporting details, and conclusion. Students introduced a famous tourist spot by applying what they had read and learned in this module. This module not only allowed students to connect learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, but also facilitated their learning and application thereof in meaningful contexts.

Example Module 2: Making Meaningful Links between English, General Studies and a Co-Curricular Activity to broaden and deepen students' knowledge

In this RaC module on *Cultures* in P.5, cross-curricular links were established through matching a module in the G.E. Programme with a module in General Studies, a co-curricular activity called *Chinese Culture Day* and a reader about China. Kahoot and multi-modal texts were also included in this module.

The learning focus of the module in General Studies was China's geographical and cultural background. In General Studies lessons, students learned about China's location and topography as well as its art and traditions. Students also learned to identify similarities and differences among ethnic groups in China. Following this, English teachers connected students' learning experiences through the G.E. Programme and the reader. For example, in Unit 4 of the G.E. Programme, English teachers taught students about cultures in the East and the West as well as how to make comparisons using target language items such as 'different', 'the same', 'similar', 'although' and 'but'. In Unit 5 of the G.E. Programme, English teachers taught students more about Chinese culture through the reading of texts about different school activities on Chinese Culture Day. The reader also helped to connect students' learning experiences, as it touched on the matters covered in General Studies, such as the topography and traditions of China. Additionally, the reader served to broaden and deepen students' knowledge of China and Chinese culture because it covered a wider range of topics such as, the terra-cotta army and the Three Gorges Dam as well as provided further interesting details about what they had already learned in General Studies lessons such as desserts, mountains and rivers in China.

With the purpose of helping students develop their reading skills, English teachers assigned various tasks from the reading booklet developed by the core team. For instance, they helped students develop the skill of making predictions about the subjects of different pages by reading the keywords on the contents page. They also guided students in identifying the main ideas in different sections of the reader, such as the sections about Chinese cuisine and art, and in locating specific information through scanning and recognising keywords. Since there were different focused reading skills in each reading booklet, English teachers used explicit instruction when teaching these target reading skills. They first explained to students what they were going to learn and why, and they then modelled how to use the target reading skill to make sense of what they had read or to answer the reading questions. Afterwards, they provided students with opportunities to practice the skill in class before asking them to try it independently at home.

While English teachers helped students to engage in deep reading and develop target reading skills in English lessons, the teacher-librarian provided interesting and suitable books for students to broaden their knowledge of China and Chinese culture. Since the co-curricular activity *Chinese Culture Day* was incorporated into this RaC module, English teachers involved students in preparing for Chinese Culture Day by writing riddles about China and Chinese culture for the game booths to be set up on that day. To give students more motivation and ideas of what to write, links and QR codes to some short animated videos of fun facts about China were included in the reading booklet. Shown in Figure 3 are some samples of students' riddles, which show students were able to use what they had read to produce the riddles. On Chinese Culture Day, in addition to putting their riddles on display, students dressed in Chinese costumes and took part in different games about China and Chinese Culture. Among these were guessing at riddles and a Kahoot game aiming to answer questions about China and Chinese culture. The teachers were delighted that all the students had a wonderful time that day!
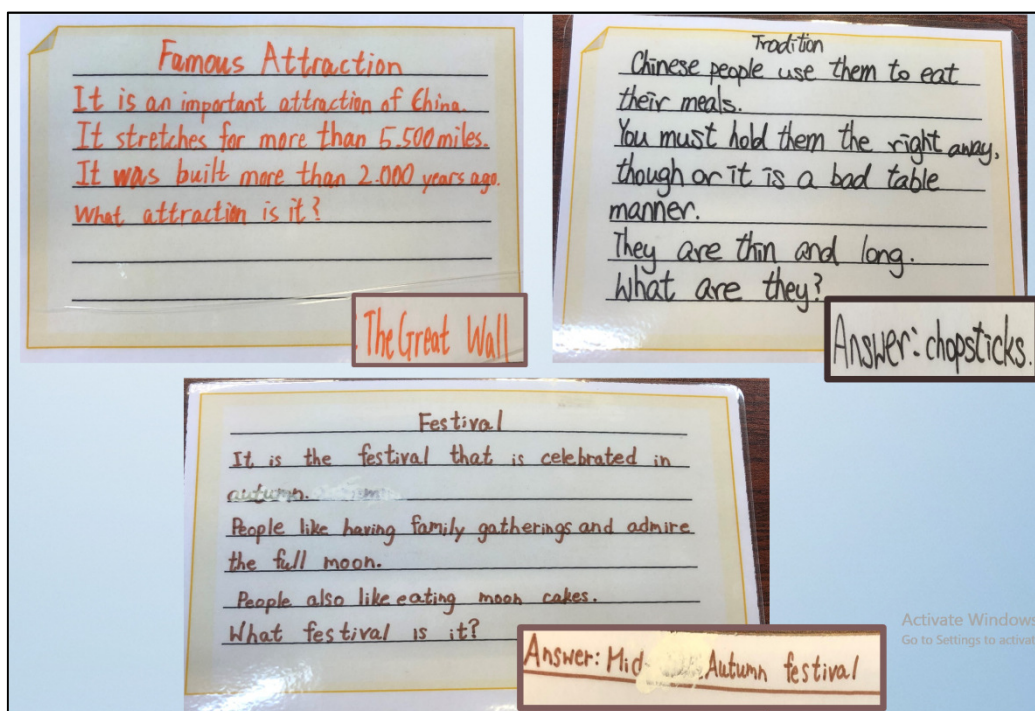
Figure 3: Samples of students' riddles

Example Module 3: Making Meaningful Links between English and Chinese to Develop Students' Knowledge of Text Structure, Rhetorical Functions and Reading Skills and Strategies

In this RaC module on *Famous People* in P.5, the core team established co-curricular links between Chinese and English, and English teachers helped students transfer reading skills and knowledge of rhetorical functions and text structure from Chinese lessons to English lessons. A reader on Helen Keller was used alongside Prezi and multi-modal texts to promote reading and RaC in this module.

Prior to the development of this module, there was no co-curricular link between the Chinese *Basketball Star Yao Ming* module and the English *People I admire* module. In the former, students were supposed to learn how to introduce a famous person by reading a text about Yao Ming, in addition to learning the structure, organisation and rhetorical function (i.e. the sequencing of events) of a biographical text. In the latter, students were supposed to learn how to introduce a person they admire by reading a text about a Hong Kong athlete, as well as learning to use the past and present perfect tenses to describe people's backgrounds and achievements. Since the core team found that the learning focuses in Chinese and English were related, they thought this would be a golden opportunity to facilitate students in transferring what they had learned in Chinese lessons to English lessons. Therefore, the core team invited the Chinese Chairperson to co-plan and adapt the learning and teaching materials with them so as to better connect students' learning experiences and reinforce the transfer of knowledge and skills from Chinese to English. Through collaborative lesson planning, the

text from the Chinese textbook was adapted to make its structure and organisation more obvious, including important sections such as background, achievements and personality. Based on the adapted text, a reading task was developed for students to identify the structure and organisation of a biographical text. A post-reading task was also adapted, and a graphic organiser was used to help students better understand the rhetorical functions of sequencing. To facilitate a better transfer of knowledge and skills, these two reading tasks were replicated in English and students were assigned similar tasks in English lessons.

After students learned from the Chinese module, English teachers guided them in reading a biographical text in the textbook as well as a biographical reader about Helen Keller. Since the core team members were afraid that most students were not familiar with Helen Keller, a multi-modal text resembling a Helen Keller Facebook page was created using Prezi so as to arouse students' interest in her. English teachers guided students in reading the multi-modal text and uncovering its features, helping them to get to know Helen Keller while simultaneously developing their reading skills. To motivate students to learn to read multi-modal texts, QR codes and links to short, simple videos about Helen Keller were included in the reading booklet. Students were encouraged to watch these videos prior to reading.

To help students develop their reading skills, the core team inserted various questions that would help students make better sense of what they read in the reading booklet. For example, students were guided to use the skill of following pronoun references, making inferences and identifying the main idea in order to understand the reader. As mentioned earlier, it was hoped that students would be able to develop their knowledge of text organisation and structure and transfer what they learned from Chinese to English; therefore, English teachers heightened students' awareness of what they had learned through the reading tasks, which resembled the ones developed in the Chinese module. The graphic organiser English teachers used to teach the rhetorical function (sequencing) in English lessons was the same as the one used in Chinese lessons. The teachers also taught students how to locate time-related words and specific information in order to complete the graphic organiser. As for text structure and organisation, English teachers used a similar framework in designing a reading task for students to learn the important parts of biographical texts, such as someone's background and achievements. In doing so, students could better understand how ideas are organised in a biographical text introducing a famous person.

To nurture students' interest in reading further about famous people, the teacher-librarian provided Chinese and English books on this topic for students. The teacher-librarian also incorporated the genre of biographical texts into the library curriculum and taught students the features of different biographical texts. In the context of library lessons, she organised an activity for students to vote for the most influential famous person, which helped to promote positive values and attitudes.

After students had read texts about famous people, English teachers tried to link reading to writing in English lessons and asked the students to write speeches to introduce people they admired. To scaffold students for accomplishing this task, English teachers provided a data file on an invented famous person and a sample text about him. They conducted text analysis to help students revisit the text organization of a biographical speech, followed by an analysis of the use of language and expressions in speeches, including how to introduce a person; how to use the past and present perfect tenses to describe achievements; and how to use adjectives to describe personality, all of which were focuses of the G.E. Programme. To take into consideration the needs of more able and less able students, English teachers provided a data file on their principal for students who might not be able to research the people they wanted to write about as well as an option for students to choose who they wanted to write about. They also guided students in referring to the framework from the reading task concerning text structure and organization for use in supporting their own writing.

Teachers were amazed that quite a number of students in the more able classes chose to read about people who had never been discussed in class. More importantly, it was found that students did not randomly copy ideas from the internet but digested the information and presented these individuals' lives in a logical and clear manner, thereby demonstrating that they were able to apply what they had learned in this RaC module.

Facilitating Factors in Promoting Reading and RaC

Clearly specifying teachers' roles has facilitated collaboration among different parties. In this initiative, the core team was responsible for coordinating and discussing with different subject departments and formulating unit plans and lesson plans, as well as co-planning with other English teachers and implementing the lesson plans with peer lesson observation. The subject teachers needed only to make adjustments to the learning and teaching content, while the teacher-librarian played a supporting role by purchasing books and resources on the chosen topics and themes and organizing activities that promoted a reading culture. A clear and good division of labour among teachers not only reduced teachers' reluctance to take part in the initiative, but also enhanced the efficiency of their work.

The success of this endeavour was in large part the result of the core team members' proactiveness in managing curriculum change. With the intention of further building on the strengths of their school, they took the initiative to apply for the PEEGS and implement major changes at the curriculum level, such as curriculum reorganisation and the integration of readers into the English curriculum. They were able to convince the other teachers of the need for change, with sound English language teaching principles and student learning evidence. They were heavily involved in planning and trying out the RaC modules with the teachers. They also took the teachers' readiness into consideration and

undertook the necessary arrangements to make these changes more manageable. Their devotion to curriculum development and their active involvement positively impacted the other teachers, which facilitated the implementation of the initiative. The success of the collaboration has also increased the core team members' confidence in leading the English Department and contributed to their leadership development.

The core team also believes that their success is attributable to the support of their principal and the involvement of other, non-English teachers, as well as to early and systematic curriculum planning.

Teachers' Reflections

Although the core team members found that the curriculum plans and implementation were not flawless, they were pleased that they were able to put their plans into action and witness students' improvement. The core team members made some key observations about students' learning. First, students were actively engaged in the reading lessons in the RaC modules. They were particularly focused when teachers included e-learning tools. Secondly, students also became more motivated to read, as they would re-read the readers on their own. Third, students tried to apply the reading skills they learned in English lessons in reading comprehension exercise in the G.E. Programme; for example, they tried to highlight keywords during reading and look for the main ideas and supporting details to make sense of what they read. Lastly, students tried to transfer and apply the reading skills they learned in English lessons when doing Chinese reading comprehension exercises.

The core team members contended that it was a meaningful and fruitful experience to brainstorm ideas together and put these ideas into practice. This journey provided them with opportunities to reflect on a number of issues, such as how to effectively teach reading, how to make reading lessons or post-reading tasks fun and how to make improvements in teaching and learning. Through working on collective wisdom during co-planning meetings, the core team members and English teachers involved in the collaboration developed a wider repertoire of teaching strategies. They gained more concrete ideas about how to scaffold student learning, strategically develop students' literacy skills and progressively develop a school-based curriculum based on students' needs and readiness. All of these factors fostered the teachers' professional exchange and growth.

Challenges and Way Forward

While the core team members found this endeavour rewarding, they encountered a number of challenges. First of all, due to Covid-19, there has been less face-to-face teaching time. Since teachers prioritised the G.E. curriculum, some group activities in the reading plans were scrapped so as to save more teaching time for the G.E. Programme and to maintain social distancing. Moreover, the General

Studies curriculum in Hong Kong was updated last year and some topics were rearranged between grade levels. Therefore, the existing teaching schedules for the General Studies modules can no longer match with those of the RaC modules. In addition to this, some of the selected readers are out of print. Lastly, there is a problem concerning assessment: the skills taught in the Reading Workshop are not tested in the assessment. Without valid assessment data, teachers cannot have a clear picture of the effectiveness of students' learning.

To overcome these challenges, the core team will review the curricula from P.4 to P.6 and rearrange the modules in order to fit with the teaching schedules of different subjects. The content of the textbooks will be reviewed and the G.E. Programme will be tailored and trimmed to free up more space for the implementation of the RaC modules. The unit plans, activities and learning and teaching materials of the RaC modules will also be revised accordingly. Furthermore, the core team will review the reading curriculum to ensure that reading skills are taught progressively in a spiral curriculum and that the reading skills taught in the G.E. Programme and RaC modules will be assessed in tests and examinations.

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