

Integrating Reading across the Curriculum into the English Language Education Curriculum: Ascending the Steps

Ms LAW Yuk-fung, Emily (Hennessy Road Government Primary School)

Ms YEE Tsz-chin, Donna (School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section, EDB)

The ability to solve problems that span multiple disciplines is a critical 21st-century skill. Ever since 2017, schools have been encouraged to extend “Reading to Learn” to “Reading across the Curriculum” (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). In the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (2024), it further recognises the importance of fostering greater connections between subjects. Seven major renewed emphases are listed and strengthening cross-curricular learning and Reading across the Curriculum (RaC) is one of them. To ensure impactful RaC learning experiences take place, what more effective method could there be than to have teachers engage in various approaches to promote it?

School Background and Tryout Journey Overview

Hennessy Road Government Primary School aspires to help students lead a healthy, enjoyable and productive school life through optimizing the effectiveness of learning and teaching and fostering positive values and attitudes.

In previous years, RaC has been progressively implemented in Key Stage 1. To provide students with a coherent learning experience, choosing P.4 as the target grade level for the tryout was the obvious choice. The school also hoped to use RaC as a vehicle to enhance cross-curricular collaboration as the RaC learning and teaching activities in KS1 were conducted with limited collaboration and could benefit from more systematic planning. Additionally, the school wished to leverage the tryout to foster a stronger non-fiction reading culture in Key Stage 2.

Three different modes of cross-curricular collaboration were explored. All involved the mapping of content and learning objectives during regular collaborative lesson planning meetings, establishing shared goals among the teaching team and discussing observations and making adjustments throughout lesson study cycles.

English teachers first mostly worked on their own and built on the input from Visual Arts (V.A.) teachers. Later, they joined hands with Music and General Studies (G.S.) teachers to synergise efforts in further enhancing students’ reading skills and understanding of the chosen topics. Various RaC texts and activities were successfully incorporated into three units in the General English programme and a myriad of benefits were reaped. Figure 1 illustrates the overview of the tryout journey.

1 st tryout Within the English subject		2 nd & 3 rd tryouts Across subjects			
Eng complemented learnt knowledge in Visual Arts		Eng joined forces with Music		Eng joined forces with General Studies	
Same topic: The Spanish artist - Joan Miro		Same theme: HK's cultural heritage + Same text type: lyrics		Same topic: Eat Well and Smart Same reading skill + reading tool: summarizing + using a mind map	
English (Post-unit stage of 4A Chp 5 <i>When I was little</i>)	Visual Arts	English (Post-reading stage of 4B Chp 1 <i>Having fun in Hong Kong</i>)	Music	English (Post-unit stage of 4B Chp 3 & 4 <i>When I was little + A Balanced Diet</i>)	General Studies
1. Read Joan Miro's biography 2. Finished post-reading tasks	1. Studied and read about Joan Miro's drawing style and technique 2. Mimicked Miro's drawing style and technique	1. Read and listened to Tai O fisherfolk songs about the life of the fisherfolk 2. Did a mini-lyrics analysis 3. Discussed ways to preserve one's cultural heritage	Read and listened to Cantonese folk songs to know more about life at certain periods of time	1. Read a book and leaflets (all NF) about eating well and smart 2. Finished post-reading tasks	Learnt about what constitutes a balanced diet, food nutrients and their functions, and how to eat healthily

Fig.1. An overview of the three tryouts

Tryout One

The teaching team was guided to go beyond the thematic approach in promoting RaC. Thus, Tryout One aimed to help students explore and gain knowledge in a comprehensive and integrative manner. It was a guided collaboration with V.A., with the P.4 English team taking the lead throughout the process.

The English lessons about Spanish artist Joan Miró complemented what was learned in V.A. After his drawing style and techniques were taught in V.A. lessons, the English extended learning activities took place. Figure 2 shows the learning and teaching objectives of them.

Knowledge	Skills	Attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joan Miro's life as an artist How his life experience when he was young affected his artwork Life lessons from Joan Miro 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn the main text type feature of a biography (life events are presented in chronological order) Locate specific information (identify important events in Joan Miro's life) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges are inevitable in one's life One should be proactive and tackle challenges head on

Fig.2. The learning and teaching objectives of the English RaC part for Tryout One

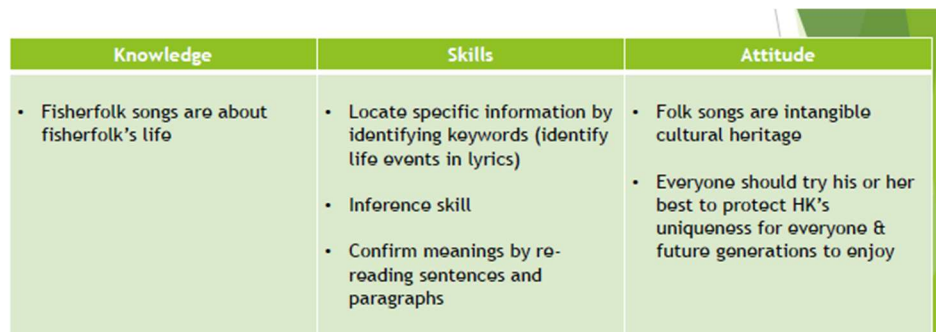
Students first read Joan Miró's biography and looked at the main feature of the text type via a group Unjumble-the-Paragraphs activity. They then filled in a timeline of his life by locating specific information. For the final activity, students reflected on life lessons from

Miró's younger years and considered how to apply them to their own lives using the "Text-to-Self" reading comprehension strategy.

Tryout Two

Similar to Tryout One, Tryout Two intended to help students establish meaningful links between concepts and ideas acquired in different Key Learning Areas (KLAs). However, it was a planned collaboration with Music. The two panel heads identified an entry point and agreed on a sequence.

This cross-curricular collaboration provided students with a more holistic understanding of folk songs and deepened their comprehension of the text type – lyrics. It started with a mini-lyric analysis of the RaC text (i.e. the lyrics of fisherfolk songs) in English lesson. Figure 3 shows the learning and teaching objectives of the lesson.



Knowledge	Skills	Attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fisherfolk songs are about fisherfolk's life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Locate specific information by identifying keywords (identify life events in lyrics)Inference skillConfirm meanings by re-reading sentences and paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Folk songs are intangible cultural heritageEveryone should try his or her best to protect HK's uniqueness for everyone & future generations to enjoy

Fig.3. The learning and teaching objectives of the English RaC part for Tryout Two

The analysis was to enhance students' understanding of the textbook content and to teach that folk songs reflect the way of life of a particular community and serve as a method to preserve history. Music lessons built on this foundation afterwards. Students listened to and closely read the lyrics of some popular Cantonese folk songs. They further learned that folk songs record important cultural events and capture the essence of culture.

Tryout Three

Emboldened by the successes of the previous tryouts, the teaching team was supported to extend their efforts beyond knowledge integration across different subjects in Tryout Three. Therefore, Tryout Three also targeted the integration and application of acquired skills. Yet, just like Tryout Two, it was a coordinated effort where the English and G.S. panel heads found a starting point and agreed on a sequence.

Students learned complementary knowledge about eating smart and well, used the same reading tool (mind-map), and practised the same reading skill (summarising skills). A RaC writing activity was also designed for students to use knowledge from both subjects.

G.S. lessons kickstarted this co-planned unit. After the module on healthy eating and nutrition was completed, students applied summarising skills by filling in a mind-map that summed up everything they learned from G.S. lessons.

Afterwards, the English RaC part began. Figure 4 shows its learning and teaching objectives. It all started with a jigsaw reading activity. In the post-reading stage, students summarised key points and shared them with peers. They then practised summarising skills again by recapping what they learned from each other via completing the same mind-map they worked on in G.S. lessons. Finally, students used the mind-map to self-critique one of their recorded meals and wrote a short reflection on whether it was a 'smart and well' meal using the target language.

Knowledge	Skills	Attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to maintain a healthy diet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pay attention to daily food & liquid intake and meal portions - realise the importance of drinking enough liquid - realise why processed foods are bad to health and avoid eating them if possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn the common text type features of non-fiction texts • Locate key information • Summarizing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a critical attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analyzing and evaluating situations objectively

Fig.4. The learning and teaching objectives of the English RaC part for Tryout Three

Impact

Teachers were delighted to see that students gained a more comprehensive understanding of concepts regarding the three chosen topics. It was also observed that their motivation to read different types of texts increased and the target reading skills were sharpened. Additionally, students showed heightened ability to use the selected reading tool. Students' positive values and attitudes, especially those that go beyond individual subjects, such as optimism and open-mindedness, were better developed.

Regarding the impact on teachers, the core team's understanding of RaC was boosted. Their skills and confidence in cross-curricular collaboration also increased. As for the curriculum, the school-based English Language curriculum was enriched. More text types and topics were included in the P.4 curriculum and most importantly, a more cohesive learning experience was created, and hence curriculum coherence improved.

Way Forward

To build on these initial successes, the team concluded that closer collaboration with more content subjects and/or other Key Learning Areas and continued curriculum optimization is crucial. Involving more teachers than just panel heads and conducting regular cross-subject co-planning is necessary. Teachers are also empowered to further venture into the different terrains of cross-curricular learning, such as project-based and problem-based learning. Additionally, to sustain upper primary students' interest in reading and maximize the benefits of RaC, more intermediate to advanced non-fiction reading skills would be progressively integrated into the school-based English language curriculum.

The traditional compartmentalisation of education is no longer sufficient in our rapidly evolving world. Only through fully embracing cross-curricular learning and reading would our students be better prepared for the complex challenges and ample opportunities ahead.

References

Curriculum Development Council. (2024). *Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Chinese version only)*. Hong Kong: Education Bureau.

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/primary/curriculum-documents/Primary_Education_Curriculum_Guide/PECG%202024_full.pdf

Curriculum Development Council. (2017). *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (ELCG): Primary 1-Secondary 6*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer. https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/Curriculum%20Document/ELE%20KLACG_2017.pdf