

A Case Study: Reading Strategies Training Scheme in a Hong Kong Primary School

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This article describes a case study on a reading programme, named Reading Strategies Training Scheme (RSTS), for second language learning in a Hong Kong primary (elementary) school. The scheme, serving learners of English as a second language from Primary One to Six (ages 6–12), was developed by the school's English teaching team. As it was being implemented, the teachers noticed the effectiveness of teaching reading strategies explicitly and of the scheme's role in their professional growth. This article examines the impact of RSTS after its first year, discusses the significance of collaborative work among frontline educators, and gives suggestions as to how a skill-oriented reading programme could be constructed in a teaching community.

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As an English as a second language (ESL) speaker, I do not remember myself being taught the way to read strategically during my primary (elementary) school years, not even during my secondary school years. And this happened to my English-teaching colleagues today as well, who have expressed their unfamiliarity with learning reading strategies systematically when they were ESL schoolchildren. Now we are all skillful readers in English; the question is, then, why do we not teach reading strategies to our ESL students? We know that the explicit teaching of reading strategies has gained attention since the 1980s, and it is in fact not uncommon to find materials on training teachers to help learners whose first language (L1) is English to develop reading skills and skill awareness in reading (e.g., Keene &

Zimmermann, 2007; Latha, 2005). However, explicitly teaching second language (L2) readers reading skills in a schoolwide programme, especially in primary school contexts, does not seem to be frequently recorded in the literature.

During recent research on teaching inferencing in ESL reading lessons (Lee, 2013), I learned about the benefits of explicit instructions (see also Goeke, 2009) to teach reading. With the purposes of improving teaching and learning, as well as for professional staff development, I proposed to my fellow teaching colleagues a schoolwide explicit reading instruction scheme titled Reading Strategies Training Scheme (RSTS), which has had a trial run for a whole school year in the primary school I served. Outcomes of the scheme have significant implications not only to the teaching staff of my school, but also to the general ESL teaching community.

This article discusses the rationale for the development of the RSTS, describes how it was co-designed and carried out by the pioneering teachers, and examines the impact of this scheme in our teaching context. At the end of the article I make suggestions as to how the teaching of reading strategies should be placed in an English language curriculum.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Three lines of strategy training methods for teaching reading are often found in the recent literature:

1. The *collaborative approach* features extensive teacher–student and student–student interactions in class to foster learning. A famous offshoot of this is *reciprocal teaching* (see, e.g., Pressley, 2000).
2. The *think-aloud* method features teachers' modelling of thinking aloud while reading. It provides chances for students to practise think-aloud and to be activated for comprehension strategies (see, e.g., Israel & Massey, 2005).
3. The *explicit instruction approach* encourages teachers to explain the reading strategies explicitly, model their use, guide students to practise, and ultimately lead them to use the strategies independently (see, e.g., Goeke, 2009; Taylor, Harris, Pearson, & Garcia, 1995; Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001).

Nonetheless, there has been a dearth of research on L2 reading strategies instruction in primary schools in the past decades, despite the fact that Kern (1989) stated the advantages of training

elementary students in the use of comprehension strategies. It has been pointed out that, through strategies training such as inferencing and synthesizing meaning, students' cognitive resources could be used more efficiently.

Being one of the English curriculum developers in my school, I see benefits of reading strategies training for my ESL students. I thus initiated the RSTS based on models of teaching reading. I selected the explicit instruction approach as the stem of the scheme, with the collaborative teaching approach and think-aloud method as supporting methodological variations. All of the pioneering teachers helped to construct the details of the scheme in its first year of implementation. My hope was that the establishment and evaluation of the RSTS would not only be significant to the teaching and learning environment in the participating school, but also would make a considerable contribution to the scarce lesson research in ESL reading instruction in primary schools.

The participating school described in this article is a Chinese-as-a-medium-of-instruction boys' primary school located in the urban area of Hong Kong. The majority of the students' families have middle socioeconomic status and all of the students speak Cantonese as their first language. In the school, English is a compulsory subject and is taught as a second language. In terms of learning to read in English, the students of the school had been under the tradition of answering questions that followed the given texts. An unspoken impression was that learners read to get answers. Internal lesson observations revealed that most of the teachers fell into this question-and-answer routine when teaching reading. This mode of learning has been seen by educators as undesirable, yet it still seems to be a dominant lesson framework in elementary schools (Allington, 2002). In Hong Kong, the phenomenon that reading lessons are based on information extraction tasks is not uncommon, and it sometimes causes resistance from young learners (Lin, 1999). My fellow English teachers recognised the problem and agreed to strive for a change. This was challenging, however, because most of them had not received any special training to teach reading strategies. There were not even any immediately available relevant resources for

our teaching context. Therefore, the team worked together on the scheme outline that I presented at the beginning of a school year. The RSTS was being shaped and enhanced as it was in operation.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

This study is consistent with an exploratory qualitative case study design whose features were defined by research methodologists such as Merriam (1988), Yin (1989), and Creswell (2013). First, this study limits itself to the description of a specific case that happened in one concrete entity, that is, my school, and is bounded by time, that is, a school year. Second, to be precise, this study is *intrinsic* because its intent was to explore the recorded case for its interest instead of understanding a specific issue or concern. Third, this study shows an in-depth understanding of the case by collecting and interpreting data from various sources, including lesson observation data, teachers' comments, and students' work. Last but not least, this study concludes with a set of suggestions as general lessons learned from this particular case.

I had these core questions in mind when conducting this study: How is the implementation of the RSTS supported by the literature? How do teachers respond to the RSTS? How do students respond to lessons of the RSTS? What can we learn from the implementation of the RSTS after a school year?

DEVELOPING THE READING STRATEGIES TRAINING SCHEME

To some, *skill* and *strategy* are similar but different concepts (e.g., Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008), but given the purpose of this article and the fact that there is still a lack of consensus of these terms among the pioneering teachers of the RSTS, these terms are applied interchangeably here.

The RSTS has two main features. First, it is a primary school ESL reading scheme developed from transferable reading strategies, which is very different from the traditional text-based teaching framework. Second, the development and implementation of the scheme form part of the teachers' professional development. The team has gained and grown in the process, as have the students.

Participating Teachers and Students

This RSTS involved all 13 local English teachers of the school, including me, and all 30 classes of students (930 students in total), from Primary One to Six (ages 6–12). All students were male. Over 99% of the students involved in the study were Chinese, with Cantonese being their first language. Except for the Primary One students, who had 10 English lessons weekly, the other students had 9 lessons per week. In general, the students' English standard was reasonable. All 13 local teachers were experienced English language teachers. They all had a desire to find an effective way to train the students to become competent and engaged readers.

Scheme Design and Implementation

The scheme lasted for a whole school year, from September to June. It was conducted in two cycles, one for each school term. I initiated the scheme at the staff development meeting in August, before the school year started. I introduced the purpose and framework of the scheme and explained how teachers at each level could contribute to the design. Each teacher received a copy of the RSTS guidelines.

The RSTS was primarily module-based. During each term, for each level, three to four reading strategies training modules were implemented. Each module lasted for three to four lessons, depending on the standard of the class. And one to two texts were chosen as teaching materials, through which the reading strategies were introduced. The sample strategies for Key Stage Two (Primary Four to Six) are displayed in Table 1 (from RSTS guidelines; terms and concept borrowed from Hudson, 2007).

Teachers from different grade levels were invited to discuss what content to include in their respective levels for the term. Because it was a new scheme, the teachers were expected to design the modules progressively. Reflecting from the experience, they were able to enhance the subsequent modules and teaching methods. The RSTS guidelines outlined sample schemes of work for different levels. As for the lesson plans, the coordinating teachers at each level uploaded their plans in a commonly accessible folder in the school intranet for sharing and recordkeeping. Table 2 shows the suggested scheme of work for Primary Five and Six for the first school term.

TABLE 1. Reading Strategies for Key Stage 2

Word Attack Skills

- Ignore words
- Guess word meaning morphologically
- Guess word meaning syntactically
- Guess word meaning contextually

Fluency Skills

- Locate specific info
- Identify main ideas
- Find key lines from texts to guide you through the rest of the paragraph
- Get the gist from paragraphs

Comprehensive Skills

- Draw inferences
- Understand the connections between ideas
- Understand intention and emotion from texts
- Make predictions
- Make a summary

Critical Reading Skills (for advanced classes)

- Evaluate a text
 - Analyze the textual pattern
 - Understand how different text types are typically organized
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Regarding the teaching method, I promoted the explicit instruction approach to teaching reading strategies. The approach, according to Goeke (2009), was to teach with clear objectives and meaningful tasks, providing plentiful modelling and explanation and achieving a mutual engagement between teachers and students. I suggested that the teachers observe one another's lessons and discuss teaching methods. There were co-teaching periods once a week for Primary One to Four. In a co-teaching session, two English teachers would go into the classroom together, and this period was allocated for the RSTS at those levels. With an extra teacher in class, more attention was given to students who needed more assistance in the learning process.

An RSTS observation sheet (Appendix A) was designed to help the teachers evaluate and criticize one another's RSTS lessons. During peer observations, the teachers were asked to indicate on the observation sheets their levels of agreement to 10 statements, mainly concerning the explicitness of lesson content delivery and

TABLE 2. First-Term RSTS Scheme of Work (Primary Five and Six)

Module*	Activities	Focus	Learning outcomes
Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Read aloud (individual/group) ✓ Think aloud (individual) ✓ Listing of inferences (individual/pair/group) ✓ Gist getting (individual/pair) ✓ Extended writing (individual) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inferencing • Emotion • Main idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verse/choral speaking • Discussion • Reading journal entry
Fiction-narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Character discussion (pair/group) ✓ Prediction (individual/pair) ✓ Plot analysis (individual/pair) ✓ Plot evaluation (individual/pair) ✓ Dramatizing (group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character • Plot design • Summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion • Reading journal entry • Mini-drama
Nonfiction-informational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Scanning (individual) ✓ Gist getting (individual/pair) ✓ Text attack (individual/pair) ✓ Word attack (individual/pair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text organization • Specific info • Word attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion • Reading journal entry

* One key piece for each.

lesson staging. Also, observers could suggest further improvements in detail. For each term, the teachers were encouraged to observe at least one RSTS lesson and to be observed at least once in an RSTS lesson. I collected copies of the RSTS observation sheets at the end of the year for an overall review.

TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENTS

The pioneering teachers were essentially the course designers in the scheme and knowledge providers in the explicit teaching. The teachers successfully co-developed all lesson plans and materials for the RSTS for both terms of the year. In the case of co-teaching lessons, they took up different roles; sometimes teachers took turns to take the leading role in the lesson, and sometimes they led the lessons jointly, depending on the lesson plans and activities.

One pioneering teacher came up with the idea of compiling different texts into a level-based comprehension book for the RSTS, differentiating different genres and highlighting reading strategies. Figure 1 shows the content and “notes to students” pages of the book for Primary Four (second term) designed by the teacher. As shown, the product contained ten pieces of texts divided into seven text types. There were consolidation tasks

Contents

Notes to Students

- ✓ Strategies to Improve Comprehension Skills
- ✓ Type of Comprehension Questions

Unit	Title	Text Type	Page No.
1	Wolves	Information Report	4
2	The Solar System	Information Report	8
3	My Memoir	Autobiography	10
4	Inventing a Flying Machine	Factual Recount	11
5	The Seal and the Storm	Narrative	13
6	The Princess, the Prince and the Mushrooms	Narrative	15
7	The Dance of the Thirteen Skeletons	Poetry: Narrative Poem	18
8	The Duel	Poetry: Narrative Poem	21
9	Once Upon a Fairy Tale	Dramatic Dialogue: Descriptive	23
10	Reusing the Old Ones Saves the Earth	Procedural	27

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Notes to Students

Strategies to Improve Comprehension Skills

- ✓ **Read the passage once** through quickly to understand its overall tone and purpose. At this stage, you need not be too bothered about unfamiliar words or phrases.
- ✓ **Read the passage again** to find the required information and underline the relevant information.
- ✓ Use contextual clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases in the passage. This makes use of your understanding of the whole passage.
- ✓ Use connectors such as “and”, “because”, “so”, “also”, “then”, “next”, “but” to review your predictions, confirming or rejecting them, and to gather new information to add to them.
- ✓ **Tap into your background knowledge** (prior knowledge i.e. something that you know) of the text, and introduce and expand the vocabulary required for the understanding of the text.

Type of Comprehension Questions

You need to respond to a wide range of comprehension questions. In order to answer these questions effectively, you should not only focus on literal question types, but also questions that require other thinking skills.

- ✓ **WHAT** question: require you to pick out specific information from the passage. Answers to such questions can be located easily because the information is usually given quite clearly in the passage.
- ✓ **WHEN** question: requires you to look for information relating to time or period.
- ✓ **WHERE** question: requires you to give information relating to place.
- ✓ **WHO** question: requires you to give information relating to a person or people mentioned in the text.
- ✓ **WHY** question: requires you to give reasons from the passage and sometimes provide your own reasons.
- ✓ **HOW** question: requires you to describe the ways, means, and extent mentioned in the passage. Information is usually not directly given but can easily be inferred.
- ✓ **INFERENTIAL** question: requires you to put together some information in the passage, then infer or draw conclusions from them.
- ✓ **VOCABULARY** question: requires you to answer questions on the meaning of a word or phrase in the text. Sometimes, a word or phrase may be given, and you are asked to look for a word with the same meaning in the text.

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Figure 1. Sample pages from RSTS comprehension book (Primary Four)

following each text, but the focus was always the strategies to read them.

Another pioneering teacher designed a book-report booklet named *reading log* to extend the RSTS. The reading log incorporated various report formats and provided guidance to students about how to present their reviews after reading a book. The intention was not only to motivate the students to read English books, but also to enable them to practise strategic reading at home and to promote engaged reading as a habit. Coincidentally, Lyutaya’s (2011) suggestion of reading logs has the same purpose of promoting extensive reading and facilitating various types of creative responses to books. Figure 2 shows sample pages of our version of the reading log.

I further contributed to the scheme by conducting an action research project with my two classes of Primary Six students during the year when the RSTS was first launched. The main finding was that, through an explicit instruction approach, the

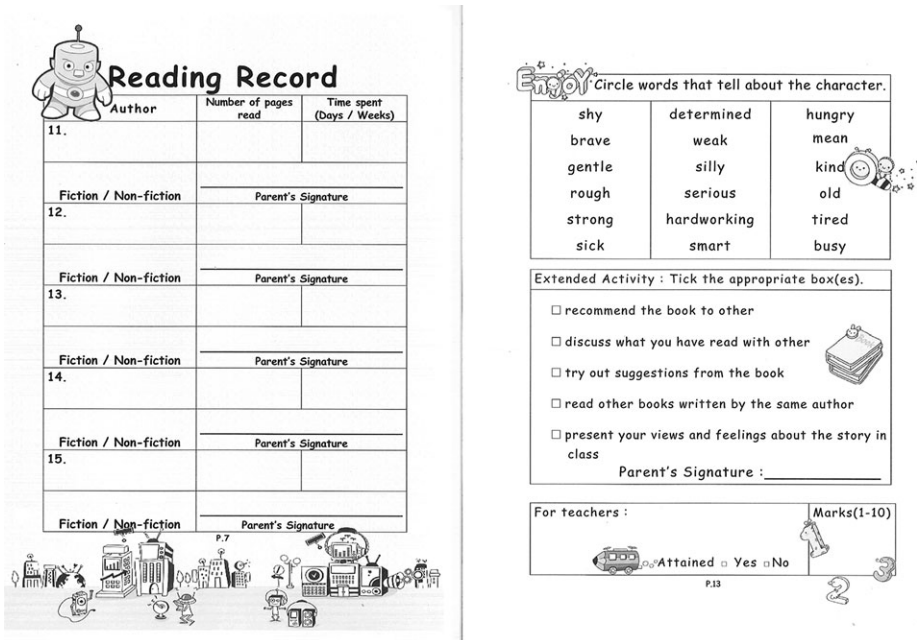


Figure 2. Sample pages from reading log (Primary One to Three)

Primary Six boys gained knowledge and awareness in L2 inferencing substantially. The progress of the action research was made known to my colleagues and that was an important part of the RSTS, because my experience in the explicit teaching method was relevant to the other teachers as well, and I wanted to turn my experience into theirs.

Involving all English teachers in this project had the advantages of enhancing the scheme effectively, increasing the staff's sense of ownership and motivation for the scheme, and encouraging the staff's contributions and creative thinking.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

The students were engaged in a wide variety of learning tasks in the RSTS, ranging from plot recognition and word guessing (Primary One) to inferencing training and genre analysis (Primary Six), according to the teaching plans shared among the teachers. The students were reported to be mostly on task and attentive during the teaching process. Teachers observed progressive improvement in the application of reading strategies. Sharing from the teachers informed the team that the students' competence and awareness of the strategies taught were enhanced in the process.

A pioneering teacher of Primary Four shared that her level incorporated extended writing into the modules of the RSTS. She observed that her students were so inspired and motivated by the in-depth teaching of texts that they produced creative written responses to them. She noted that some of their work was even more advanced and complex than the chosen pieces. Moreover, in the module on poetry, her classes showed appreciation of the pieces while learning to recognize the poetic devices. The teacher was satisfied with the students' overall reactions to the learning content presented.

Some teachers' feedback, which centred on the students' effective learning and the application of strategies, was given in the end of the school year through an evaluation form (Appendix B). Below are some examples:


(Students) related and applied the reading skills in the general English lessons.

The skills were used in the students' own reading (informal sharing with students).

I noticed that when some students were reading an article, they became aware of using some reading skills that they have learnt.

Once the students understand the features of different text types, it helps them in their writing too.

Students' work that showed learning progress in the RSTS mainly took the form of open-ended tasks. Figures 3 and 4 display sample work of students in the scheme. Figure 3 shows a reading log entry written by a Primary One student. This piece of work consolidated students' concepts of the problem-solution pattern of stories. The writer of this entry responded to the task appropriately and showed interactivity with the book.

 **Book Report** E

Title : Fire Truck to the rescue.
Author : Sonia Sander
Illustrator : Mada Design

Who is the most important character?
The firefighters is the most important character.

Where does the story take place?
The story took place in the building.

What problem did the character face?
There is a fire in the building.

Show how the problem was solved.
The firefighters go fight the fire. The fire is put out.

Extended Activity : Tick the appropriate box(es).

- recommend the book to other
- discuss what you have read with other
- try out suggestions from the book
- read other books written by the same author
- present your views and feelings about the story in class

Parent's Signature : _____

For teachers : Attained Yes No

Marks(1-10)
3 9 1
2

P.24

Figure 3. Reading log entry sample (Primary One)

1 There was a prince named Llewellyn. His uncle, King John, gave him a dog,
 which was a hunting dog. The dog's name was Gellert. Gellert was a fine
 hunting dog. When he left the castle, he could smell a deer one kilometre
 away. He could run faster than a deer. He was so strong that he could knock a
 5 deer over. He was an excellent hunting dog. Gellert could defend the castle
 because he was so strong that
 could knock a deer over. means it
 will go

One day, Prince Llewellyn went hunting with his friends. He called all his
 dogs, but Gellert wouldn't go. Gellert stood in the doorway of the castle and
 wagged his tail. He put his head on one side but he would not leave the
 10 castle.

Maybe Gellert knew there are
 no deer in one kilometre away.
 Llewellyn was angry! He shouted, 'Come on, Gellert! Come here!' But
 Gellert wouldn't leave the castle. So Llewellyn and his friends went hunting
 with the other dogs.

15 Llewellyn and his friends caught nothing. When they came back to the castle
 they were angry. As they came to the castle, Gellert bounded out towards
 them, wagging his tail. As he came closer, Llewellyn saw there was blood on
 Gellert's face and sides. it hurt himself? Have something happen before
 Llewellyn back.

20 'How could that be?' Llewellyn thought. 'Gellert sometimes plays with my

Figure 4. While-reading note-taking sample (Primary Six)

Figure 4 shows a Primary Six student's performance on a while-reading note-taking practice during the lesson. In this particular task, after the teachers' modelling, students were instructed to jot down comments on the given text. The text was titled "Gellert," a narrative text adapted from Wright (2003, pp. 186–187). This student demonstrated competence in bridging information and creating hypotheses based on available information.

Moreover, students' mastery of the comprehension questions requiring higher order thinking skills was observed in the Primary Four and Six year-end assessments, where more questions of such type were adopted deliberately. The assessors had an overall

impression that the majority of the test takers at those levels scored higher than they had when asked to respond to information-extraction questions in the past.

EVALUATING THE SCHEME

The RSTS was evaluated through discussions with pioneering teachers, adoption of a lesson observation sheet (Appendix A) and a year-end evaluation form (Appendix B), and observation of students' work. The scheme underwent ongoing evaluation as the teachers at the same level had regular meetings to discuss the progress and exchange teaching ideas. A departmental sharing session was done in the middle of the year, when the level coordinators shared teaching experience with the rest of the team. The scheme generally received positive receptions from colleagues, including the English department consultant and the school head, and it was agreed to continue for the second term.

At the end of the school year, the teachers were given an evaluation form to express freely what they felt about their experience with the RSTS after a whole year of implementation (some of their comments were quoted in the previous section). The purpose was to criticize the scheme constructively. I evaluated the scheme based on the teachers' feedback and observation records. In total, 23 observation sheets and 12 evaluation forms were received at the year-end.

According to the RSTS observation sheets, peers often supported one another and praised their efforts in planning the lesson and motivating students to read. Some colleagues particularly noticed the teachers' good use of the blackboard to indicate lesson goals and to highlight key concepts in reading. Also, the extensive use of higher order thinking questions was recognized and appreciated. It was a good sign that the teachers were paying more attention to their teaching styles through the scheme. However, some observers indicated room for improvement in terms of lesson staging and the teacher's modelling. The lesson observation reports revealed that many teachers were not aware of effective lesson staging for explicit teaching. Wilhelm et al. (2001) have explained that the steps of

passing strategic expertise to students should involve modelling, apprenticeship, scaffolding, and independent use. I added that goal-setting and wrapping up at the start and end of each lesson, respectively, would be useful for scaffolding purposes. Some observers pointed this out in their observation reports:

Less time should be spent on motivation, so that you can spend more time on the practice stage.

Teacher may consider revising the structure of the text type (i.e., information report) at the end of the lesson in order to better consolidate students' memory.

May conclude what they have learnt at the end of lesson.

Some commented on the explicitness of delivery:

The reading skill (making predictions) could be taught more explicitly.

There could be more emphasis on the structure of a poem; students could have a chance to review the features.

Try teaching the target skills explicitly and providing plenty of examples and discussions before asking for individual work.

Also revealing were the responses from the year-end evaluation forms. For the item asking for the satisfactory level for the scheme on a scale of 1 to 5, eight respondents indicated 4, and there was one each for 3, 3.5, 4.5, and 5. The mean score was 4.

Teachers were, in general, content with the structure of the scheme and its promotion of explicitly teaching reading strategies to young learners. Synthesizing their written feedback, they thought that the RSTS had several advantages:

- It helps learners become good readers.
- It helps learners know more about specific skill and genre.
- It provides in-depth reading to benefit learners.
- It helps teachers plan lessons in a more organized way.
- It encourages teachers to collaborate more.

Examples from teachers' reflective comments on the strengths of the scheme show that the RSTS had been developed and implemented effectively:

Students learnt about specific reading skills explicitly... More organized and systematic this year.

It offers teachers in-depth reflection on teaching reading comprehension.

Teachers revealed during meetings that students at some levels made very effective use of a lesson journal to jot down important points to improve reading strategies. This changed the format of a reading lesson in the school. Prior to the implementation of the RSTS, the primary students had become used to learning reading by searching for sentences or phrases from a text to fit the questions that followed, as if answering questions was the main task. The RSTS changed the students' views of reading and made reading the subject of learning. They placed the emphasis on the strategies themselves, which could be applied to different texts. It was as valuable an experience for the students as it was for the teachers.

On a different note, criticism of the scheme came from the fact that the concept of strategies training was rather new to most of the pioneering teachers when the scheme started. It caused confusion at times, and the teachers had to go through a trial-and-error period. Also, having the stress placed on the teaching and learning process and the enhancement of teaching methods, the English department of the school still looks for detailed quantitative figures revealing improvements in the students' use of the reading strategies. Yet, unless specially designed assessment papers are made to test the taught strategies specifically, students might not show much improvement in standardized language tests even after interventions (Duffy et al., 1986).

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING A SKILL-ORIENTED READING PROGRAMME

In light of the outcomes of the RSTS after its first year of implementation in the primary school I served, below are some suggestions on the construction of a schoolwide reading programme that focuses on reading skills. Although the following suggestions come from an ESL reading programme in a primary school, I believe they are applicable and relevant to a wider English teaching context and community.

- *Identify the reading skills to teach.* In order to build a skill-oriented reading programme, it is essential to select a set of reading skills for the programme. Hudson (2007, p. 79) provides a comprehensive list of reading skills consisting of “word attack skills,” “comprehension skills,” “fluency skills,” and “critical reading skills,” which has greatly contributed to the content selection for the RSTS. Educators may make their own choice from other available resources as well, according to the needs and culture of their schools and classes of students. As Hudson argues, though reading skills may be categorized as higher level and lower level, a definite hierarchy of the skills may not be appropriate. Teachers may consider mixing different levels of reading skills into the teaching programme. In practice, for a two-term-per-year teaching context, I suggest that teachers choose approximately four skills to focus on per term. Depending on students’ progress, the second term may repeat the skills introduced or involve new ones.
- *Set clear guidelines for teachers.* Developers of a schoolwide skill-oriented programme are strongly advised to provide clear guidelines for teachers to follow. In my teaching context, teaching reading via reading skills was something new. In order to make teaching effective and implement the scheme effectively in every class, all my fellow teachers received a booklet of guidelines explicitly indicating items such as the rationale of the scheme, the aims and goals of the scheme, timelines, evaluation mode, and advice on teaching methods. I suggest using guidelines as the framework within which teachers of different levels can work out the details of lesson plans and task designs. In order to make a schoolwide reading skill training scheme work, teachers should be well informed of the expectation of lessons and deliver the lessons in more or less the same approach.
- *Encourage teachers’ engagement.* Teachers’ proactive involvement and collaboration are very contributive to the building of a teaching scheme. I encouraged my teammates to help come up with ideas to enhance the RSTS, and I was glad to see them being active team players. I consider that the RSTS would have been much less successful without the valuable input from the teaching team, such as the creation of a comprehension booklet and a reading log. Also, sharing of good practices is important. Although some publications provide materials and/or guidelines on ESL reading strategies instruction (e.g., Mikulecky, 2011), each school’s culture is unique; it always depends on teachers’ regular sharing of experiences whether a good teaching norm of a new reading programme can be well established.
- *Emphasize teaching, and monitor learning.* As a teaching team in school, we often trust one another’s teaching quality and neglect our different approaches to teaching the same topic. However, in teaching reading skills explicitly as a schoolwide programme, I suggest that teachers co-plan lessons and observe one another’s teaching to sharpen their teaching skills in reading strategies. Also, if administratively possible, co-teaching could be a good way to maximize the impact of teaching and learning because more

students could be catered to at the same time. Appendix C provides a sample lesson plan from one of my co-teaching RSTS lessons in the second year of implementation. The plan shows the explicit and skill-oriented trend that the RSTS attempted to bring forth.

- *Set up an evaluation system.* Setting up an evaluation system does not imply a heavy experimental design or a pressurizing assessment process to pioneering teachers. The use of interviews and/or feedback forms with the student and teacher participants could already be revealing (see, e.g., Mak, Coniam, & Chan, 2007). In my teaching context, the student participants might be too immature to be reliable in interview sessions or written feedback. Therefore, I invited the teaching team to fill out observation and evaluation forms to reflect on the scheme. It takes time for a community of critical friends to be developed, but it is important and necessary for the programme leaders to have an open mind and invite constructive feedback from their teammates. The collected feedback from the participants should be reported back to the teaching team for a discussion at programme review.

CONCLUSION

With a focus on the teaching and learning of reading strategies, the Reading Strategies Training Scheme had its complete implementation in a whole school year at a Hong Kong primary school. A system was collaboratively developed by the teaching team, involving lesson content, teaching approach, peer observation culture, and an evaluation procedure.

The RSTS was designed and conducted based on theories of teaching reading. Teachers involved in the scheme had positive responses to it and found the scheme rewarding in teaching and learning, and student participants showed advanced learning through the learning of reading strategies in this scheme. Furthermore, from the observation of the research outcomes, a set of practical suggestions on building up a skill-oriented programme to teach reading was introduced as an important learning and reflection from this case study.

Importantly, the RSTS brought the teaching staff closer to each other as they had to work out the details of the plan for their specific levels of students. Teachers became reflective as they tried out new methods and materials; this brought new knowledge to the teachers themselves. *Learning to teach* and *teaching to learn* happened simultaneously for reflective

practitioners who had a desire to improve their practice (Kwo, 1996). The scheme offered the teachers a valuable learning opportunity. This initial success of the reading scheme conforms with previous research findings that instructional process programmes for reading, ones that provide teachers with professional development on teaching with a specific method, are likely to yield positive achievement effects (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008). As for the students, the RSTS provided chances for learners to view English reading in a more constructive way. The lessons stimulated them to think critically and pay attention to text structures and reading processes. In the long run, their learning should help equip them to become engaged and strategic readers of English.

Moving onwards, the lesson planners and material-developing teachers of the RSTS continue to review the materials they used and look for better ones. For monitoring the students' progress, the pioneering teachers consider shifting the assessment mode toward the higher order thinking end, involving more question items that require, for instance, inferencing and critical thinking. With the RSTS being a skeleton of the English language curriculum of the primary school concerned, the significance of the text-based questions, especially for the senior primary students, should decrease gradually. Finally, the RSTS developers wish to promote the sharing culture among teachers concerning teaching methods. The dissemination of the findings presented in this study would hopefully encourage the teachers involved to continue to build on what they have learnt in the RSTS, and stimulate other ESL educators to rethink their approaches to teach reading in their own teaching contexts.

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APPENDIX A

RSTS Lesson Observation Sheet

Teacher: _____

Class: _____

Observer: _____

Date: _____

Part A. For the 10 statements listed below to describe the lesson you observe, please tick (✓) on the right scale to indicate your level of agreement, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. You may tick in between categories.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The teacher clearly indicates the goal(s) of the lesson.					
2. The teacher provides good motivations for students to learn the reading strategy(ies) to be introduced.					
3. The teacher puts the lesson into different stages effectively.					
4. The teacher provides clear and useful examples of the use of the target strategy(ies).					
5. The teacher provides effective guidance to students for the use of the target strategy(ies).					
6. There is an appropriate level of interactive atmosphere in the classroom to assist learning.					
7. The teacher provides an adequate amount of chances for students to practise the target strategy(ies).					
8. The teacher reviews the importance and the use of the taught strategy(ies).					
9. It is evident that most students understood the lesson and they are on task.					
10. The lesson is helpful to students in terms of learning to read in English.					



Part B. Please provide any other comments in the space below for the potential improvement of the lesson and development of the teacher.

Thank you very much for your help!

Observer's signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

RSTS Teacher's Evaluation Form

Dear English teachers: Thanks for helping develop the RSTS over the year and exercise it in your classes. It's time for the panel heads to evaluate and improve the scheme for next year. Please kindly provide us with as much reflection as possible. We truly appreciate your contribution in this. Thank you for your time!

Level(s) of teaching: _____

1. How would you rate the scheme in terms of its quality? Please score it out of 5 (5 is the best):

2. Having implemented the RSTS for a year, what do you see are the strengths of the scheme?
3. What are the areas for improvement in the scheme next year? Please elaborate (e.g., lesson allocation, frequency, material design, collaboration, instructions).
4. Please share any successful experience you have had in the RSTS.
5. Please share any challenges you have faced in the RSTS.
6. Any other comments or suggestions concerning the RSTS:

Date: _____

Thanks so much for spending time on this form. Your constructive feedback, be it positive or negative, is highly valued.

APPENDIX C

RSTS Lesson Plan (Grouping and Comparing Information)

Teachers: Teacher A (TA) and Teacher B (TB) (co-teaching)

Duration: 35 minutes

Class level: P. 5

Class size: 30 students

Aims:

- To provide students (Ss) with more chances to practice the reading skill of grouping and comparing information between different texts.
- To reinforce students' understanding of the use of the skill.
- To help students internalize the skill through peer interactions.

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students are expected to

- have solid knowledge about the skill in question;
- have confidence to practice the skill with other texts;
- be able to apply the skill in their own reading contexts.

Material:

A worksheet with two short news articles on one side and a table for information filling on the other (supplement to the booklet they used).

Previous knowledge:

The class had done a similar task a week ago with another pair of short news articles. They had to draw their own tables to display grouping and comparing of text information.

Procedural Stages	Interaction pattern	Duration	Purpose(s)
<p>Lead-in</p> <p>TA starts off eliciting from the class what reading skills they practised last week (grouping and comparing text info).</p> <p>TA asks why learning such skills would be useful.</p> <p>TB asks in what situations in real life would we use such skills.</p> <p>TA and TB share with the class some real-life examples using such skills (reading different travel brochures; reading students' work of the same theme, etc.).</p>	T → C	10 mins	<p>a. To link the session to their knowledge.</p> <p>b. To help Ss understand the rationale of learning such skills.</p> <p>c. To make the learning goals clear to follow.</p>
<p>Step 1: Two odd news</p> <p>TA announces that the session will focus on a worksheet with two genuine odd news articles from online newspapers.</p> <p>TA and TB distribute the worksheets and ask Ss to quickly read the news articles.</p>	T → C	6 mins	<p>d. To enable Ss to have a basic understanding of the articles so as to smoothen the next step.</p>

(Continued)

APPENDIX C. (Continued)

<p>TA asks Ss to be ready to use one sentence to retell each news article.</p> <p>TA and TB walk around to monitor progress and provide help as needed.</p> <p>TA checks random Ss' summarization response to see if the class generally understand the texts.</p>	<p>Ts → Ss</p> <p>T → S</p>		
<p>Step 2: Grouping and comparing TA demonstrates the grouping of the time and place information from the texts via a table on the chalkboard and asks Ss to try to categorize some other types of information from the texts. They are to put down the names of the categories and details in the table provided on the back of their worksheets (expected categories: source of info, subjects, problems, solutions, etc.).</p> <p>TA suggests that Ss work with their partners for the task.</p> <p>TA and TB walk around to help different groups.</p>	<p>T → C</p> <p>S ← → S</p> <p>Ts → Ss</p>	<p>10 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. To enable Ss to practise the focused reading skills. f. To encourage collaborative learning to enhance motivation. g. To check progress and motivate learners to engage in the task.
<p>Step 3: Whole-class discussion TA draws a big table on the chalkboard and invites Ss to tell the categories they found.</p> <p>TB writes down each category and discusses with TA and the class if they are good choices.</p> <p>TA asks the details of information found under each category in each text.</p>	<p>Ts → C</p>	<p>7 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. To enable Ss to learn from each other. i. To enable Ss to understand why some categories are better for comparison than the others.
<p>Closure/follow-up TA wraps up the lesson and asks Ss to complete their tables with more details at home.</p>	<p>T → C</p>	<p>2 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> j. To consolidate what they have learnt and practised in the session.