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THE THREE PILLARS OF THE HAPPY READING ALLIANCE

PROFESSOR CAROL A. GORDON

Dr. Carol Gordon, Associate Professor of Information and Library Science at Rutgers University, U.S.A., was invited by the Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation to visit seven Happy Reading Alliance *schools in Hefei. Dr. Gordon has extensive teaching and educational consulting experience, in the U.S. and around the world. She currently teaches in the graduate and doctoral programs at Rutgers University. Her research focuses on how children and adolescents process and learn from information, the role of traditional and transliteracies in learning, and how school libraries promote learning in the digital age.*

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR GORDON AFTER HER VISIT TO HEFEI FOR THE KICKOFF CEREMONY OF THE HAPPY SOUP READING ALLIANCE, IN FEBRUARY 2012

My work as a college professor at Rutgers University in the U.S.A. often takes me to places far from home. When Tina Chan, Executive Director of The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation, visited our research center, The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) at Rutgers University, she learned that I would soon be at a conference in Nanjing as a featured speaker. Tina invited me to Hefei to visit seven schools where the Foundation is supporting The Happy Reading Alliance, an initiative that puts current literacy research into practice. I was delighted to have this opportunity, but as I thought about the recent research in literacy and school libraries I wondered:

"What do research-based teaching practices and support for literacy look like?"

"Is The Happy Alliance program working, and if it is, how will I know? "

My questions arose from many years of disappointment in reading programs used around the globe

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ENGLISH SUMMER CAMP VISIT, YUNNAN

Accompanied by Teach For China's (TFC) Growth Strategy and Development Manager, Evan Kornbluh, the Foundation visited *The English Summer Camp* in Lincang, Yunnan province, on August 17th.

Using funds from the last Foundation-supported TFC project in Yunnan, the three-week *English Summer Camp* was held for 40 secondary school students, selected from 300 applicants. The selection panel did not focus on English proficiency, but instead sought highly curious students who had shown themselves to be good learners. The team of teachers consisted of some TFC foreign and Chinese fellows, as well as local teachers. Over the three weeks, students not only learned English vocabulary

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THE THREE PILLARS OF THE HAPPY READING ALLIANCE

CAROL A. GORDON

that offer young readers no choice in their reading selections, no time to develop the habit of reading by reading in school, little modeling of reading by adults, including teachers and parents, and inadequate or no access to appealing reading collections or school libraries. While technically correct, many of these programs ignore reading motivation, engagement, and response. They concentrate on the mechanics of reading, failing to support the emerging literacy of young and adolescent readers as they venture into the world of the written word. Have these schools in Hefei successfully created a culture of reading that helps children discover that they love to read, just as they love to listen to the poetry, music, and stories of their childhood? Have they succeeded in creating lifelong readers? Here is the evidence I have gathered that answers my questions.

What do research-based teaching practices and support for literacy look like?

It was clear that there was a strong culture of reading in every school I visited. In a conversation with Xzn Yang Cui, Principal of Changfeng Primary School, she described the three pillars that support The Happy Reading Alliance: Infrastructure; Time Allocation; and Access to Books.

Infrastructure is built around the commitment of principals, teachers and parents to reading. The schools provide workshops for teachers and parents to learn how and what to read with their children. They learn the benefits of reading and how to conduct a "reading lesson," which looks like a read-aloud, by asking questions that help children interpret what they read and make predictions about what comes next. The lesson helps students use other reading strategies such as questioning the author and using contextual clues. The cover of the book is always analyzed as a kind of advance organizer that prepares children for what they will read. The questions teachers and parents pose are not only checking for understanding; they are aimed at engaging students and sustaining their engagement. Parents are empowered because they are part of the culture of reading and their feedback is valued. Children are also empowered as they respond to their reading by drawing and writing about it, and their work is prominently displayed throughout the school. They create their own books and share them by putting them in the school library. They participate in performances as they act out the stories of the books they read to audiences of children, parents, and teachers. Teachers are empowered to decide how to conduct these performances as they prepare the scripts and direct the rehearsals. They are not only familiar with the books the children are reading; they are passionate about them. Reading becomes part of their teaching lives and they are accountable for their students' performance in reading. The strong commitment to reading is made possible by the leadership of principals who provide professional development and encourage teamwork, reflection, and innovation as teachers work with each other and with the children to develop activities and lessons around reading. Principals, as well as teachers and parents, are role models who read to the children. They engage in evidence-based practice as they conduct focus groups with teachers and parents, for example, to collect feedback that they can use to improve and expand reading practices. A principal noted, "We reach for the sky to turn children's dreams into reality."

The second pillar, Time Allocation to reading, makes reading happen within and beyond the school day. This is a valuable use of instructional time because we know that the more children read, the better they read. Time for reading is part of the curriculum, not an add-on. Additionally ten minutes are allocated each day for reading aloud. This practice of reading as a community encourages children to express and share their ideas and feelings about what they are reading. It exposes them to a wide breadth of reading, helping them to identify their personal reading interests.

The third pillar, Access to Books, ensures that every child enjoys the availability of books. This is especially important for children who may not have books at home. Every child's desk contains at least one book waiting to be read. There are books in the corners of classrooms and carts filled with books at the doors of every classroom. Books are displayed in open spaces throughout the

schools. School libraries house a wide assortment of books and are open to all students all of the time. One school has a floating book system: every student has a book to take care and share with others. In some schools classes visit the library for lessons. One school had a flea market at their Reading Festival where children bought and swapped books.

Is The Happy Alliance program working, and if it is, how will I know?

There is a common philosophy among the seven schools in The Happy Reading Alliance that the principals expressed as their beliefs about reading. Every principal considers the three pillars of their reading culture as foundational to the implementation of these beliefs. They work with teachers and parents as partners who hold the belief that reading should be fun, and that it should be done every day. They believe that all children can read, and that belief is communicated to the children. It is their conviction that the children are becoming more creative because of their reading lives. It is these beliefs that support a strong culture in their schools that values reading as the key to educating creative and innovative members of a 21st century society.

"The strong commitment to reading is made possible by the leadership of principals"

I also know the alliance works because these beliefs and the reading practices employed by the seven schools are based on empirical research. When Stephen Krashen visited Hefei for a conference last year he provided that research from his book, *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research.* Because of Stephen's advocacy for literacy and libraries, we know what research-based practice looks like. I knew The Happy Reading Alliance was working when I listened to the questions posed by parents in their workshop as they struggled to find ways to find the time to read to their children. I knew it was working when I watched principals taking time to read to children. I knew it was working when I listened to teachers asking the right questions when reading aloud to their classes. I knew it was working when I saw concentration and enjoyment in the faces of fifty children in a first grade classroom as they participated in their reading lesson. I knew it was working as I watched third grade children engage in sustained, silent, and deep reading. I knew it was working when I watched a spirited performance of "Stone Soup." I knew it was working when I saw hundreds of pieces of students' drawings and writings that captured the sense they made of their reading. I knew it was working when I observed the well-used condition of the library books. I knew it was working when a young boy ran up to me at the book market of a Reading Festival and said, "**I love to read!**"

HONG KONG SCHOOLS VISIT SUMMARY

2012 was an important milestone for the Foundation as the Stone Soup Happy Reading Alliance was established in the Hefei district. The Alliance currently has 16 member schools, consisting of 8 veteran schools and 8 apprentice schools. In late 2012, the Foundation started its Librarian Training Program for the Alliance, which aims to build school libraries into learning and resource centers through teacher-librarian training.

From 4-10 November, principals and teacher-librarians from some of the participating schools were invited to visit Hong Kong, to see schools and libraries that are run according to the principles of the training program. The visiting delegation consisted of the 8 veteran primary schools from the Alliance, namely: Tunxi Lu Primary School, Shuguang Primary School, Taihulu Primary School, Wanghu Primary School, Weigang Primary School, Changfeng Normal University Associated Primary School, Hefei Normal University Associated Primary

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HONG KONG SCHOOLS VISIT SUMMARY *(continued from page 3)*

School, and Qinianlu Primary School. Officials from the Hefei Government and Hefei Education Bureau also joined for the visit, which had two primary objectives:

1. Visit model school libraries
2. Establish a long-term training relationship with the Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians' Association (HKTLA)

The visit was jointly organized by HKTLA and the Foundation. 8 local primary schools were chosen to exhibit their libraries during the 6 day tour: Ho Lap Primary School, Ho Ming Primary School, The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tseung Kwan O Methodist Primary School, Christian & Missionary Alliance Sun Kei Primary School, HHCKLA Buddhist Wong Cho Sum School, Hong Kong Baptist Convention Primary School, and Tin Shui Wai Catholic Primary School. As well as looking round these primary schools, the tour also included visits to the Hong Kong Central Library and Eslite bookstore. After a tight schedule of visits, the seminar on Nov 10th, School Libraries Powering Ahead《學校圖書館的前進》, marked the end of the tour.

During the visits, teachers got a chance to explore various facilities and libraries, and also to experience the reading culture on every school campus. Each host school's teacher-librarian gave a presentation on their library and displayed reading materials made by students: pictures drawn by students; book reports etc. While hardware is crucial to provide a comfortable reading environment, soft skills are also key to raising students' interest and effectiveness in reading. In each presentation, featured reading activities as well as the roles of teacher-librarians were explained to the Hefei teachers to ensure they left with clear ideas on how they should improve their libraries.

Closing Seminar: *School Libraries Powering Ahead*

This seminar was jointly organized by HKTLA and the Foundation to enable experience sharing in library management and reading promotion. Officials from the Hong Kong and Hefei Education Bureaus, the president and vice president of HKTLA, as well as the principal from the Stone Soup Happy Reading Alliance were invited to present during the seminar. Officials from Hong Kong and Hefei described the assistance given by the government to their local schools in creating reading culture, while speakers from HKTLA and the Alliance shared their methods and tips for promoting reading. With everyone's hard work, the Hefei schools from the Alliance have achieved preliminary success in creating a strong reading culture. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of room for improvement, particularly when it comes to the school library.

During the seminar, Ms. Angel Leung, the president of the HKTLA, also announced that the HKTLA would welcome the Hefei schools to apply for membership to share resources. The seminar ended with a Q&A session. If you would like to learn more, you can download each speaker's PowerPoint at the Foundation's website.

Lastly, we would like to express the Foundation's appreciation for each and every participant's efforts. We hope this tour gave Hefei teachers more to think about, and more ideas about the role of school libraries and teacher-librarians. In the coming months, the Foundation will continue to focus on librarian training in Hefei. The first module of training began right after the Hong Kong visit.

First Teacher-Librarian Training in Hefei

The first teacher-librarian training was conducted from November 12 to November 14 in Hefei, after the Alliance Schools' principals and staff had returned from their trip to Hong Kong *(see cover story)*.

39 teachers from 17 Reading Alliance Schools attended the training. As well as teacher-librarians, English teachers were also invited to join the training program. Most resources and materials on school library management are written in English, and so English teachers play an important role helping teacher-librarians access advanced library management information from around the world.

The training program will last for at least 9 months and consists of 11 modules, including topics such as the role of a teacher-librarian, library collections, and information literacy. Each module would take 12 to 16 hours to complete and we hope such program will equip the teachers with knowledge and skillsets to develop the libraries into the most popular place in the school.

The first module covered the role of a school-librarian, and the role and place of information within a school. Karen Ip, librarian director from the ISF Academy in Hong Kong, vice president of the Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians' Association (HKTLA), together with our dear library consultant Prof James Henri, were invited to lead this module.

Most teachers thought school-librarians were simply book keepers, whose job is to maintain the library's collection and cleaning. But in today's education system, the school librarian is a resource organizer and a teaching partner. He / she is responsible for building the culture of reading and inquiry into the school and its pupils. Ms. Ip introduced this idea with the example of her school and her job. The idea was a new one for many of the teachers, but positive feedback were received and reflected a tremendous change in understanding about the value of a school library and the

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English Summer Camp Visit *(continued from front page)*

and grammar in the classroom, but were also exposed to various aspects of Western culture: watching movies, playing outdoor sports and activities, and learning and acting out dramas. This ensured students were in a fun and interesting English-speaking environment.

The night we arrived, we observed the last phonics class. We were surprised that even though it was 8 o'clock in the evening, teachers and students were still full of energy and enthusiasm. Students didn't laugh if their classmates made mistakes; they were all eager to learn. The summer camp ended with drama performances. All children had the chance to perform on stage, and students' families were invited to attend. With guidance from their teachers, students performed well-known stories such as Snow White, as well as a script they had written together. This story was about a child in the US and a child in Yunnan, and explored what might happen if they were to swap lives and lifestyles. We weren't there to judge acting talent or production values, but we were really able to feel the happiness and confidence of the children on stage. We were very impressed by their significant improvement in English, too. The participating students had only learned English for one semester, and were already able to speak in full, long sentences, and sing English songs.

The modest funding used clearly had a huge impact on participating children. The Foundation was impressed by the TFC fellows' enthusiastic spirit. The fellows were a group of young individuals who demonstrated strong leadership qualities and a strong sense for innovation. After this project's success, the Foundation will work with TFC more closely in Yunnan, including supporting similar small projects run by TFC fellows, bringing reading and play projects to them. We are looking forward to these collaborations in 2013.

Bring Me A Book Trainers Visit Mainland China

In October 2012, the Foundation and Bring Me A Book™ Hong Kong invited Julie Fowlkes and Pauline Young on tour in Mainland China, visiting Shanghai, Haimen and Beijing to give training workshops to our partners.

A reading specialist with over 40 years of international experience in early childhood literacy, Julie Fowlkes joined the Bring Me A Book Foundation in Mountain View California in 2004 and was instrumental in developing, piloting and training facilitators in Bring Me A Book's award-winning First Teacher's program.

Pauline Young, a communication specialist, published author and storyteller, graduated from San Francisco State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English and an MBA. After working in corporate and employee communications in Hong Kong and the United States for over 10 years, Pauline started her own training consultancy in 2001 and frequently travels between China, Hong Kong and the US, giving talks and communications workshops for corporations, government agencies and nonprofit organizations. She also leads many early literacy programs and creative storytelling "playshops" for schools, libraries and community centers. Her first children's book, "Socks Heaven", was published in 2004.

The dynamic duo made quite a presentation team under difficult circumstances: Julie had to communicate and connect with audiences despite the language barrier; Pauline had the dual tasks of presenting her own material, and translating Julie's teaching at the same time. It was the first time Julie and Pauline had led workshops in this way, but the experienced pair were well prepared, and even the larger audience groups were engaged and enthralled by the sessions.

Julie's warmth and passion was clear to all those participating in the workshops, and even without Pauline's excellent translations, the enthusiasm and love with which Julie approaches reading with children was felt by all who attended.

Julie and Pauline conducted several training sessions and workshops over their short trip, with audience sizes ranging from 20 to over 100. Among others, important topics included how to make children feel connected with the stories, how to create your own books, and of course a host of reading techniques and tips. Parents and teachers asked many pertinent questions, for example how they should choose appropriate books, and what to do if a child only seems interested in one kind of book. Julie and Pauline were very impressed by the way parents and teachers responded in class, consistently giving thoughtful, structured answers to open questions.

A key message from Julie and Pauline to all audiences was that reading should above all be *FUN*, and seen as pleasure and leisure, not work.

First Teacher-Librarian Training in Hefei *(continued from page 5)*

significant role that the teacher-librarian could play in the school to promote reading and learning.

This training is just the beginning, and participating teachers will be kept up-to-date with new ideas in the future. A school principal's

support is highly important for this training, as they need to select a good teacher to be librarian, and support their new ideas which will be implemented at school. The Foundation will work together with participating schools to build their libraries into reading and learning resource centers.

HEART EDUCATION: TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE-SHARING SESSION FOR "READING & DEVELOPMENT" PROGRAM IN YUNNAN

From 17-20 November 2012, by invitation of and with financial support from the Foundation, staff from the Wisdom Boat Program of Heart Education and teachers from Guanmiao Central Primary School in Jinzhai County, Anhui province, participated in the Training and Experience-Sharing Session for "Reading & Development" Program held at Yunnan Normal University in Kunming, which we also currently support.

During the event, Wisdom Boat Program staff and Guanmiao Central Primary School teachers jointly led and hosted four lectures, four reading workshops and one film-sharing activity.

Wang Xing, Wisdom Boat Program's manager, introduced the operation of the Program in Guanmiao Village, Jinzhai County, Anhui Province, and shared information about how the Program has helped to improve reading development at the village school in Guanmiao in three distinct ways: books, time, and capable teachers.

Zhao Jiacai, vice principal of Guanmiao Central Primary School, presented the changes generated to the school by introducing activities like open reading, independent reading and "book flowing".

Hu Shilan, a teacher at Guanmiao Central Primary School, shared information about how the school established its book borrowing and reading system, and how it created borrowing records. Hu also introduced how the school trained young students to be library administrators, getting them involved in the daily management of the school library and enabling them to be masters of the library.

Liu Boping, also a teacher at Guanmiao Central Primary School, made a wonderful presentation about picture books, including an introduction to picture books, how to read a picture book and how to teach a class with a picture book.

Through the following four workshops on reading in village schools: *A General Trial on Picture Book Reading Activities*, *Classroom Teaching of Stories in Picture Books*, *Practice on Building a Family Library*, and *Independent Reading and Reading by Interest*, there was profound and intense discussion among participants and teachers.

In the evening, all participating teachers watched a documentary introducing the *Hope Reading Project,* launched in Taiwan by the Taiwan Tianxia Foundation. By showing the progress made in reading activities organized by village schools in the rural Dashan area, Aowan, Taiwan, the documentary helped to strengthen teachers' confidence in launching picture-book reading activities.

After the experience-sharing session, the participants actively approached relevant staff of *Heart Education* to copy materials so that they could share what they had learned with teachers who hadn't been able to attend..

The event not only gave village teachers in Yunnan the opportunity to learn about the practices and experience of *Wisdom Boat Program*, but also helped improve the practical capabilities of the Program staff and reading teachers in Guanmiao. This lays a firm foundation, both theoretically and practically, for implementing the upcoming *Wisdom Boat* plan of cultivating rural reading teachers at a grassroots level.

We hope to facilitate more of such exchange activities between our partners in the future to promote the exchange and sharing of best practices between different regions.

KRASHEN'S CORNER

Stephen Krashen is Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. Professor Krashen has made profound contributions to the fields of second language acquisition and bilingual education, and has published over 350 papers on these topics.

Professor Krashen is a strong advocate of voluntary reading as one of the most powerful tools in language acquisition, and we are honored to have him and his team join us and our sister organization, Bring Me A Book™ Hong Kong in promoting literacy in Hong Kong and China.

This section is dedicated to Professor Krashen and his team as we share their ideas and findings. For more information, please visit http://www.sdkrashen.com/

Improving Character Recognition in Chinese: Let's Try Meaningful Reading

- Stephen Krashen

Schusller (2012) observes that the huge task of character recognition discourages many students of Chinese.

Research done with native speakers of Mandarin suggests that increasing meaningful reading is an effective path to character acquisition and to literacy development in Chinese in general.

Ku and Anderson (2001) found that for fourth graders in Taiwan reading an unfamiliar character in context resulted in a modest increase in the ability to recognize the character on a test, similar to the increase found for reading unfamiliar words in English by native speakers of English. This modest increase, given enough reading, is enough to account for character knowledge, confirming that reading is an important source of character knowledge.

In addition, Ku and Anderson reported that knowledge of semantic (meaning) radicals and the phonetic component of characters did not contribute to acquiring character knowledge from context. Rather, only helpful (more comprehensible) contexts were associated with better acquisition.

The results of two other studies confirm that literacy development in Chinese is stimulated by reading.

Shu, Anderson and Zhang (1995) reported that third and fifth graders in Beijing who reported more reading outside of school did better on a vocabulary test of "difficult" words. Similarly, Lee and Krashen (1996, 1997) reported that for high school students in Taiwan, the richness of their print environment was a significant predictor of how much they read on their own, and the amount of reading they did was a positive, but modest predictor of how well they wrote. How much they wrote on their own was not a significant predictor of writing in Chinese.

Shu, Anderson and Zhang conclude that "incidental learning from context through wide reading may be an important avenue for the vocabulary growth of Chinese children … the best way to help children develop their vocabulary may be to lead them to become independent learners, to let them have more time and opportunity to read, to provide them with suitable reading materials, and to encourage them to read widely" (Shu, Anderson, & Zhang, 1995, p.92).

These results are in complete agreement with what has been found for English, both as a first and second language. They might also hold for Chinese as a second language.

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PROFESSOR STEPHEN KRASHEN AND HIS TEAM VISIT HEFEI

The Foundation was honored to invite Professor Stephen Krashen and his team, Professor Syying Lee, Professor Christy Lao and Dr. Effie Wang to visit Hefei from September 10–13. This visit was the start of the Foundation's collaboration with the team to research the impact of the Foundation's work in Hefei.

The research project will explore the impact of the past 5 years of Foundation support for building reading culture in Hefei schools. This is the team's first research project in mainland China, and will measure impact on children as well as changes to schools.

During the four-day visit, the team visited several Reading Alliance veteran schools, and met with principals and teachers to discuss their views on reading and related activities. Invited and organized by Hefei Baohe District Education Bureau, a lecture was presented by Professor Krashen: *How we acquire language and literacy, and how this knowledge can make language arts easier and more interesting, with much better results*.

Lecture Synopsis:

The last three decades of research have supported a remarkable and simple hypothesis: We acquire language when we understand it, not when we "study" it, and we develop literacy (e.g. Reading, writing style, vocabulary) through reading, especially through self-selected reading that we are genuinely interested in.

This "breakthrough"(common sense to many people), promises to make school much easier and much more interesting for students and teachers. Happily, the evidence so far tells us that language arts programs that include self-selected reading of interesting texts produce far better results than traditional methods.

Professor Christy Lao shared her program, *Learn Chinese as second language by comic books* and *How to learn English by story books* was introduced by Professor Syying Lee. These interesting and effective teaching methods gave the Hefei teachers new ideas about language teaching.

Pilot research will soon commence, exploring issues such as whether or not children will continue to read easy books after they have grown up, or if they will choose material according to their reading level. This evaluation will focus on Grade 6 Books, and will find out if the children are reading books which are appropriate for their age.

At dinner in Hefei, Professor Krashen filled the school principals with confidence:

"We are all soldiers fighting in the same battle – the war against ignorance. We need to save our children and children everywhere from this. Don't let what we think we can't do stop us from doing what we can do."

The Foundation is honored to be part of this battle, and will continue to work hard to ensure children's accessibility to interesting and suitable books.

Literacy Study Success Masks Sorry Tale of HK's Reluctant Readers

Pia Wong, Executive Director of Bring Me A Book Hong Kong
Published in South China Morning Post 11/1/2013

The recent results of Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011), considered the "gold standard" in measuring literacy development globally, provides a perfect example of the failings and short-sightedness of our current approach to education and the dangers it creates for our society over the long term.

Hong Kong is the top performer in reading achievement but ranked lowest out of 45 regions in terms of motivation to read and family literacy.

Only 12 per cent of Hong Kong parents engaged in some form of pre-school literacy activities with their children versus the international average of 37 percent.

Hong Kong children also scored very low in terms of interest to read (39th out of 45 entrants) and confidence to read (44th out of 45 entrants).

What does this tell us? Quite simply, Hong Kong children are disposed to read not because they like it, but because of extrinsic motivation from parents and teachers in the form of external recognition, rewards or incentives.

Iris Chan's letter ("Pressure an integral part of school system", January 2) is a clear example of how far removed we are, as parents and educators, in providing the right attitude and approach to learning.

While doing well in exams is certainly important, it is not the be all and end all.

Should we really be patting ourselves on the back because our children scored so high on the reading tests yet they have no interest or self-motivation to read?

Our current attitudes may churn out great score cards, but this does not create lifelong learners who can think for themselves, are confident, self-motivated and interested to seek new possibilities and challenges.

Sadly, Hong Kong parents also ranked lowest in the PIRLS report with only 14 per cent of them enjoying reading for pleasure (versus an international average of 32 per cent).

The home provides modelling and direct guidance not just in effective literacy practices, but in our whole attitude to learning. If we ourselves aren't motivated for the right reasons, what chance do our children have?

From all of us here at the Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation, we wish you a very Happy Chinese New Year, and a joyful, healthy and prosperous Year of the Snake!

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Find out more about the Foundation at:

http://www.chenyetsenfoundation.org/index.html