



Two sisters are reading picture books during the public welfare picture book reading activities in Red Willow Village in Xiaoxian, photoed by Zixuan Wu .

Early childhood reading in a less developed area of China

“Popularization of Picture Book Reading in Xiaoxian”

Introduction of the situation in Xiaoxian and possible solutions to some problems according to model city, Guangzhou

Inspired by public welfare picture book reading activities taken in

February in 2019 by Zixuan Wu, one of the group member

Group name: Plath [T12]

Affiliated High School of South China Normal University,

Zixuan Wu, Zhiyi Huang, Shiqi Chen, Jiening Le

August 20, 2019

On the first day of February in 2019, two sisters came to Brigade Party Branch of their village, Red Willow Village, in Xiaoxian to participate the picture book reading activity. This was their first time to read picture books. “‘Well done, Peppa!’said Peppa’s dad,”the girl read for her little sister, who was listening, carefully.

Why We Started

In the February of 2019, an investigator operated a public welfare activities to provide fifty picture books for her hometown village in Xiaoxian. During the activity, she found that most of the children from the first grade to the sixth grade had never read any picture books. Most of the parents had never known picture books, either. At the time when most of the villagers had built new houses with their own money, the low popularization in the picture book reading in Xiaoxian could not only be economy.

The Simple Introduction of Picture Book Reading

The Picture Book

The picture book is a kind of reading material that uses the delicate combination of pictures and words to express a thesis. Authors may transmit profound meanings through narrating stories, like *Badger's Parting Gifts*, or purely introducing scientific knowledge with the help of delicate images.

Importance of Picture Book

Tadashi Matsui, the Japanese “Father of Picture Book”, states in *My Picture Book Theory* that picture book can help children develop imagination, perceive rhythm of their mother language, cultivate interest towards reading, and even enhance parent-child relationship. Tang Yaming, one of Chinese experts in children literature, said in *Seeds of Happiness*, “Children’s reading in all the countries need to follow the path of picture book reading.”

Considering that picture books are expensive, Wang Lin said in the interview through phone that he suggests people relying on public resources instead of

individual-buying. Thus, public organizations like schools and libraries have great responsibility.

Children's attitude

In the picture-book-reading activity held in Xiaoxian in February of 2019, most of children were happy to come. Their eyes stayed constantly on the pages, some even with smiles. Elder sisters read for their little sister or brother who could not read by themselves. Some boys competed to narrate *No, David* to friends. “I love the humorous picture books,” Yifan Zhong, one grade-three participant of the activity, said.

In Guangzhou, many students are familiar with picture books. Many students investigators interviewed were interested in picture books with interesting stories like Barbie series, scientific knowledge like The Magic School Bus series, or even English ones. “I like the combination of those beautiful stories and interesting pictures,” a girl from The Primary School Attached to Sun Yat-Sen University said with excitement.

Popularization of Picture Book Reading in Xiaoxian

Kindergarten

“The most appropriate age for children to read picture book is from 0-6,” Wang Lin said. As a result, the investigator inquired one kindergarten in Xiaoxian.

Guirong Zhu, in charge with the Taolou kindergarten in Holy Stream Township in Xiaoxian, said, “I have never known any picture book, and there is none in our kindergarten.” The school paid little attention in students' reading. Teachers regarded all-round-development education as not allowing to educate with books, paying little attention to children's reading—students only read some children's songs, and there was no requirement on kindergarten-reading at all. No teacher combined picture books to teaching, and the school did not have enough money to buy picture books.

Parents

Mrs. Zhou, an eight-year-old boy's mother, said that although herself and other parents understood the importance of reading, they did not know which books children should read. Parents around Mrs. Zhou hardly heard of picture books or saw the importance of them. Together with parents' urgent hope of children's high scores, according to Guirong Zhu, many parents will not support school to read books with many pictures but few words. In turn, Mrs Zhou reflects that if the school requires the students to read picture books, parents will support.

Schools and parents can influence each other. One of them must realize the concept of picture book reading and persuade the other, which needs the third party's force.

The Picture Book Store

Picture book store is a new form of picture book providers in the community. Many are chain stores. In Xiaoxian, there is only one picture book store—Senior John Picture Book Store—opened in Anliang Central Garden in 2019.

It plays an important role in spreading concept and providing picture books. Since the workers are preschool-education teachers and the headquarters's regular training, workers know the importance and method of reading picture books and will read picture books to the children every week. The manager will advice the parents to proceed parent-child reading and promote picture-book-reading concept in her Wechat. The store provides many classics picture books like *My Dad* and *My Mom*, and it also provides a specialized area for reading and the service for borrowing books home. Two hundred parents had become her clients in about half a year.



The reading area of Senior John Picture Book Store, photoed by Zixuan Wu.

Xiaoxian County Library

The only reading room for children was about fifty square meters. One shelf stood on each side of the room: books for early children were on the left, on which alphabet books, riddle books, encyclopedias, and picture books were mixed together.

No high quality picture books—books recommended by picture book promoters—were displayed. No preschool children or any parents there, and children were reading comics or riddle books but not picture books.

“I know picture books,” the curator said, “but not deeply.” Neither other nine persons who managed the library did.

About picture books’ quality, curator introduced the process of buying books. First, the librarians in charge of buying books ask the lowest-price book seller to make library’s book list whose cost no more than fund given by government. Then, the librarians select books from the list. If the amount is large, they will select online, and if it is small, they will select in the bookstore. Because no librarians have the concept of picture book reading, promoting the reading in library is hard. Moreover, the process of buying books detracts the quality of picture books library can provide. Library needs external force to impel the picture book reading.

Conclusion

Picture book reading’s popularization is progressing in Xiaoxian, but the promotion still has some weaknesses. As for kindergartens, some of them do not have the consciousness or money to proceed picture book reading, and there is no policy or the support of parents. For parents, some do not have concept of picture book reading: teachers do not spread the concept to them. About social organizations, library’s concept and resources still need external force to improve, but the picture book store has a good chance to spread the concept and provide picture books to families.

The Suggestion Gotten from Guangzhou

Kindergarten

For Kindergarten Affiliated to South China Normal University (KASCNU), a teacher, Ms. He, said that teachers combined picture book reading into their classes and encouraged students and their parents to read picture books in their spare time. Picture book reading is penetrating into the everyday teaching: teachers use themes of the books to educate students to cherish lives, have self-esteem, and so on. Ms. He

admitted that the principal is crucial: although Guangzhou Education Bureau requires kindergartens to prepare reading materials for children, it does not mention picture books. Therefore, whether or not a school advocates to read picture book mainly depends on the principal's decision.

The picture books in KASCNU come from government's fund and parents' donation. KASCNU gets the parents' support with teachers' transmitting the concept.

Library

Guangzhou Picture Book Library uses Labor Division System. Only the ones who promote the picture-book reading concept need to have the professional knowledge picture books. This not only reduces the money for library to train a lot of librarians about picture book reading, but also increases the professionalism of workers. "The promotors will use many ways to spread the idea, such as organizing reading salon, story-telling party, and so on," the woman in charge of the library said. In this way, library is able to publicize the concept to parents, children, and even schools.

About books' purchase, Guangzhou Yuexiu District Library makes book list by workers themselves. Thus, the librarians not only can ensure the quality of books, but also can save money by removing some unwelcome books.

Picture Book Store

The investigator finds at least eleven picture book stores in Guangzhou through internet. Like the one in Xiaoxian, they spread the picture book reading concept to and provide books for parents and children. Youbei Picture Book Store, for example, gives lecture for parents to emphasize the importance of reading picture book and holds reading party.

Suggestion Overview

For the same three communities, Guangzhou provides a better running plan. First, for kindergartens, the concept of principal and the Education Bureau's attention to

kindergarten's reading decide whether picture books can be combined to classes. Second, for social institution, hiring professional promoters and making book list by itself can help achieve the spread of concept and provision of high-quality books. Third, teachers and organizations in community can have a good influence on parents' thoughts.

Overall Conclusion

For Xiaoxian's picture-book reading popularization, it still has a long way to go. Some kindergartens and the Education Bureau lack attention to early children's reading, which can be improved by policies to early children's reading and higher-standard principal. Parents are waiting for external power to guide them in children's reading, so schools and social institutions should expand their spread in the picture-book reading concepts. Library lacks the attention to picture book reading and does not provide high-quality books, which might be solved by hiring professional workers and making book list on itself. Also, picture book store is a main force to propel the picture books reading in the society.

Wang Lin said in his interview, "this is a process." Indeed, the popularization of picture book reading needs countless baby steps forward, and investigators hope that China will never stop.