

# The Synergistic Effects Between Picture Book Reading and Writing

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**Abstract:** The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) clearly points out that "integrated reading and writing ability" is a key part of primary school students' English core literacy. But in real life, primary school students often run into trouble with English writing—some don't feel like writing at all, others use the same boring words over and over, and a lot of their writing doesn't make logical sense. To fix these problems, this study picked two classic picture books, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Handa's Surprise*, and used them to see how picture book reading and writing teaching can work together. We used a three-dimensional "input-processing-output" teaching model and found some useful things: the many different ways picture books present information (like words, pictures, and even textures) really get kids interested in writing; the "language support" from picture books helps kids express themselves better; and the stories in picture books, with their clear contexts, make it easier for kids to think logically.

**Keywords:** Picture book reading, English writing, Synergy effect, Teaching model

## 1. Introduction

As globalization goes deeper and China's basic education reform moves forward, English—being an international language—matters more and more in primary school. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) says that being able to connect reading and writing is super important for students' English core literacy. It means students need to write well after understanding what they read. But when it comes to actual teaching, primary school students still face a lot of hurdles in English writing: they aren't interested enough, their way of expressing themselves is dull, and their writing structure is messy<sup>[1]</sup>.

Why does this happen? Traditional writing classes are a big reason. They often don't tie into real life, focus too much on making kids repeat language patterns mechanically, and ignore how kids think and feel overall. Picture books, which mix words and pictures, might be a way out. They have this special connection between text and images, and tell stories in specific contexts. This not only eases the pressure of learning language by using different kinds of input, but also makes kids want to express themselves through the story. When kids feel emotionally connected to the story, they pick up language more naturally.

So this study chose two classic picture books, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Handa's Surprise*, to figure out how picture book reading and writing teaching can work together. We also wanted to create a practical teaching model. In the end, we hope this gives ideas and ways to make primary school English writing classes better.

## 2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations of Picture Book Reading

### (1) The "Multimodality" of Picture Book Reading and Its Educational Value

What makes picture books different from regular books? It's their "multimodality"—they use more than one way to share information. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, multimodal communication builds meaning

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by combining different ways of expressing things, like words, images, colors, and how the page is laid out.

Take *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* for example. It doesn't just use simple, repeated words to tell the caterpillar's growth story. It also has bright, colorful pictures, pages with little holes that you can feel, and changes in how the pages are designed to create a sense of rhythm. All these together make a rich, 3D space for meaning. This fits how primary school kids think—they use their eyes, ears, and even hands to learn, which helps them understand the language better.

Mourão's research also says that the multimodal features of picture books can make it less stressful for kids learning a second language. When kids aren't anxious, they pick up the language more easily<sup>[2]</sup>.

#### (2) The "Process Writing" Theory in English Writing Instruction

The process writing theory says writing isn't just a finished piece—it's a cycle: before writing, drafting, revising, editing, and finally sharing. This theory tells us that writing classes should focus on how kids think and develop their ideas, not just the final writing.

Picture books are great for each step of this process. Before writing, the interesting stories in picture books can get kids excited to write. When drafting, kids can copy the language patterns from the books. When revising, the structure of the picture book stories can help them organize their ideas. For example, *Handa's Surprise* follows a clear pattern: preparing fruit, the fruit disappearing, and getting a surprise in the end. This gives kids a template they can use for their own stories.

This kind of support is called the "scaffolding effect", and it matches what Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory says—kids need the right help to learn better.

#### (3) Theoretical Mechanisms of Synergistic Effects

Picture book reading and writing teaching work together in three main ways: for thinking, for language, and for feelings.

For thinking: The pictures and symbols in picture books wake up the right side of kids' brains, which helps because just using words can be too abstract. For language: The real-life contexts in picture books and the repeated sentences give kids a natural base for language. For feelings: The stories in picture books make kids feel connected, which reduces their fear of writing and makes them want to express themselves. All these together make picture books a great bridge between learning language (input) and using it (output).

### **3. The Unique Value of Picture Books in English Language Teaching**

#### (1) Language Scaffolding: An Internalization Mechanism from Input to Output

From the angle of learning language, the multimodal features of picture books fit perfectly with Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Let's look at *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* again—its repeated sentence "On...he ate through..." comes up so often that it becomes a language pattern kids can remember. This kind of rhythmic language input helps kids pick up language without even realizing it<sup>[3]</sup>.

Picture books use both words and pictures, so it's easier for kids to understand the language. They learn the target language structures while enjoying the story. And even though the language in picture books is simple, it still sounds natural and has a nice rhythm. This gives kids good examples to copy when they write.

When it's time for kids to write, they can use the key sentences and words from the picture books. Teachers can help them get creative with this—like changing words in a sentence or continuing the story. For example, kids can use "On Monday, I ate..." to talk about what they ate during the week, just like the caterpillar. This way, their writing is correct, but they still get to be creative.

#### (2) Contextual Scaffolding: A Path to Developing Narrative Skills

When it comes to teaching kids to tell stories in writing, the plots of picture books are perfect for guiding them. *Handa's Surprise* uses a classic story pattern: getting ready, carrying something, losing it, and then gaining something. This clear template helps kids stop worrying about "not knowing what to write" when they start.

What's more, picture books use pictures to tell parts of the story, which fixes the problem of words not being enough. For example, the pictures of Handa carrying a fruit basket on her head show what life is like in an African village. These pictures give kids lots of details to write about.

In class, teachers can use "story maps" to help kids break down the picture book's structure<sup>[4]</sup>. Turning the abstract parts of the story into something they can see helps kids understand how stories work. Then, when they write their own stories, they can organize the plot better. Also, picture books often have clues about time (like the caterpillar changing over a week) and place (like where Handa walks). These help kids arrange their writing logically.

### (3) Cultural Scaffolding: Cultivating Intercultural Awareness

From a cultural teaching perspective, the real-life situations in picture books make writing more about communication. For example, *Handa's Surprise* shows life in a rural African village—not just tropical fruits and wild animals, but also how people there live.

Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence model says that this kind of writing practice<sup>[5]</sup>, using real cultural contexts, helps kids understand different cultures and express themselves properly. Teachers can ask kids to compare the culture in the picture book with their own life—like talking about the difference between African fruits and the fruits they see every day. This makes kids want to share their own experiences.

Also, picture books have universal values, like sharing, friendship, and being curious. These give kids deep topics to write about, so writing isn't just practicing language—it's a way to share their thoughts.

### (4) Thinking Scaffolding: A Mechanism for Promoting Cognitive Development

For kids' thinking development, reading picture books helps them develop metacognition (thinking about their own thinking). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory says that the clear story structures in picture books give kids a way to show their thoughts. For example, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* has clear time clues and changes in numbers, which helps kids build a logical way of thinking. Later, when they write, they can organize their content better.

Picture books also leave room for imagination—sometimes the endings aren't fixed. This is great for kids' creative thinking. Teachers can ask questions like "What do you think Handa will do next?" or "What adventures will the caterpillar have after it becomes a butterfly?" Writing about these ideas helps kids think in different ways and reason logically.

## 4. Design of Instructional Practice Pathways

When teaching with these two picture books, we can use a three-stage "Input-Processing-Output" model. At each stage, we need to combine reading and writing well.

### (1) Input Stage: Multimodal Interpretation and Language Immersion

When teaching *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, teachers can use a multi-level input method. First, start with the book cover—ask kids to look at the caterpillar's appearance and guess what the story will be about. This gets them ready with background knowledge.

Then, when reading the book aloud, change your tone and use body language to make the language input more engaging. Pay special attention to the repeated sentences so kids remember them. Finally, use real things—like fruit models or a caterpillar hand puppet—and let kids act out the story. This way, they use multiple senses to learn.

This kind of immersive input not only helps kids learn the language, but also gives them things to write about later. It's important to make sure the input is "understandable" — both good quality and enough quantity. Teachers can break down long sentences in the picture book into short, easy-to-copy ones. Also, make sure to repeat the key parts so kids notice the language.

Another thing: guide kids to look at the pictures and learn how to describe details. For example, talk about "red apple" or "round orange"—these visual clues will be useful when they write.

### (2) Processing Stage: Thinking Visualization and Structural Analysis

The processing stage is key to connecting reading and writing. Here, we use tools that make thinking visible to help kids analyze the text structure.

Take *Handa's Surprise*: use a "story wheel" to show the plot order (preparation-transportation-loss-gain), a flowchart to list the order of animals appearing, and a Venn diagram to compare different fruits. These tools turn the abstract story structure into something concrete and easy to see, so kids don't feel overwhelmed when getting ready to write.

For understanding feelings, draw an "emotion axis" to mark how Handa feels at different parts of the story. This helps

kids learn how to describe feelings in writing. Teachers can also organize group discussions to talk about the surprising parts of the story—this helps kids think critically.

One thing to note: gradually reduce the support. At first, give kids complete templates, but later let them choose the tools to organize the structure on their own.

### (3) Output Stage: Differentiated Tasks and Creative Expression

When designing the output stage, follow the Zone of Proximal Development theory and create different levels of writing tasks.

**Basic tasks:** Focus on copying language. For example, use "There is/are..." to describe the fruit basket in the picture book, or use number cards to write how much food the caterpillar ate.

**Middle tasks:** Focus on organizing logic. Ask kids to write a retelling of the story using "First...Then...Finally..." or add words to the picture book's illustrations.

**Advanced tasks:** Focus on creative expression. For example, rewrite the story from an animal's point of view, or write what happens after the butterfly's adventure.

When kids are writing, teachers should use different ways to give feedback. Besides the teacher's comments, let kids check each other's work (using a scoring list) or revise their own work (by comparing it to the original picture book).

Also, pay attention to the "sharing" part. For example, make a wall in the classroom to display the kids' picture books, or hold a story-sharing meeting. This way, kids get real feedback from readers and feel that their writing matters.

### Conclusion

This study used *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Handa's Surprise* to analyze how picture book reading and writing teaching work together, and what practical methods there are. Picture books have unique advantages—they use multiple modes of expression, have rich contexts, and include cultural elements. These help kids get more interested in writing, use language better, and think more logically.

By creating the "input-processing-output" three-dimensional teaching model, teachers can use the language support, story structure, and cultural contexts from picture books to help kids overcome the difficulties they face in writing—both in thinking and feeling. This way, kids can go from copying others' writing to creating their own.

But there are some things to remember. When choosing picture books, make sure the language is right for the kids' level, the content fits how they think, and it has cultural value. For lower grades, pick picture books with simple, repeated sentences and easy plots. For higher grades, choose ones with more complex stories and deep themes.

To make this teaching model work, teachers need to be good at understanding picture books and designing activities. This means teachers need to keep improving their professional skills. In the future, we need to do more in-depth research—try other methods too—so that picture books can be better used in English teaching. In the end, this will help improve students' overall English core literacy.

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