

**Introducing Canadian High Interest/Low
Vocabulary English-Language Books into
Chinese School Curriculum:
The Case of Orca's Hi-Lo Fiction**

by

Weizhang Li

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Approval

Name: Weizhang Li
Degree: Master of Publishing
Title of Project: *Introducing Canadian High Interest/Low Vocabulary English-Language Books into Chinese School Curriculum: The Case of Orca's Hi-Lo Fiction*

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Rowland Lorimer
Senior Supervisor
Professor and Director
Publishing Program

Thomas Woll
Supervisor
Adjunct Professor
Publishing Program

Bob Tyrrell
Industry Supervisor
President & Editorial Director
Orca Book Publishers
Victoria, British Columbia

Date Approved: 10 Dec 2012

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Abstract

The newly launched official edition of China's National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) has clear requirements for the teaching of reading skills at different grades. However, acquiring such skills in a conventional English reading class is quite challenging for some students. Such difficulties parallel to some extent reading difficulties of native speakers of English in North America, which are effectively addressed by the well-established practice of using high interest/low vocabulary (Hi-Lo) reading materials. This report describes an attempt to introduce British Columbia-based Orca Book Publishers' Hi-Lo reading series into English reading classes in Chinese secondary schools. The report argues that, to meet the demand of teaching English reading skills in the context of NECS, Orca's English Language Teaching (ELT) Reading Package is particularly well designed to prepare Chinese secondary school students to be confident, active, critical, and fluent readers in the post-secondary academic context.

Keywords: Orca Book Publishers; reluctant readers; Hi-Lo fiction; National English Curriculum Standards; Chinese secondary school market; English reading class

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1. Project Background

In fall 2001, China started to reform its English curriculum. By December 2011, the experimental version of the National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) was terminated and the official operational version was launched. With this curriculum launched, inevitably, the Chinese school market will be reshuffled in the coming years because all the textbooks must be revised in accordance with the new curriculum standards and submitted for approval by the Ministry of Education, meaning that the overall market share will be restructured. In September 2012, Chinese school children began to use new textbooks from the first grade to comply with the unified national plan of the Ministry of Education. As these students work their way through the grades and as others follow in their footsteps, supplementary learning materials will be updated on a large scale.

Compared with teaching English as a native language, English is taught and learned in China as a foreign language; this occurs in a non-native speaking environment, where students seldom have chances to speak with native speakers. This lack of a natural language environment in which English is predominant makes reading in English an alternative means of access for students to improve their language competence. (Wu Qing, 2009)

Naturally, the development of reading materials in accordance with NECS is a great opportunity for all textbook publishers. Although the profit margins available in the publishing of textbooks for compulsory education are very narrow because of government limits on the price that textbooks can sell for and government control of the bidding process, participating in the production of textbooks for compulsory education is an effective method to build brand awareness for textbook publishers among high school teachers and students. It can pave the way for selling supplementary reading materials, which are not similarly constrained by price limits, hence they can be a potential source of profit.

Academically, as a national guide to the teaching of English, NECS has formulated general concepts and ideas for the English curriculum. However, it has posed a great challenge for both teachers and students who need to apply these concepts and ideas in practice. For example, NECS states that “a unity of tools and humanities” is very important. Similarly it advocates “a student-centred class;” that learning materials should “motivate students and build their confidence;” that “English be integrated with other disciplines;” and that “students be helped to improve their skills for processing information, critical thinking, and problem-solving.”(Ministry of Education of China (ME), 2011: p.2, p.15, p.20) In an effort to comply with the intent of the new curriculum, classroom teachers are asking for an operational guide on effectively implementing concepts of the NECS in daily teaching. To be specific, they are in need of detailed instruction on design and implementation of teaching plans, appropriate at-level learning materials, exercises and tasks, extracurricular activities and evaluation methods.

The adoption of National English Curriculum Standards will be a gradual process and a new venture for the current school education system. In part, this is because schools across China are considerably varied in terms of history, geography, economy, faculties, students, facilities and management levels. In another part, for the majority of secondary school students, the college entrance exam is a critical variable. Long impacted by exam-oriented education, the teaching of English reading in secondary schools used to focus largely on language knowledge and examination skills. As such, it failed to provide guidance on reading strategies, skills, and methods. This teaching method placed students in a passive state and deprived them of reading pleasure. As a result, students’ motivation and initiative in learning English were severely impaired and many of them gradually lost interest in English reading. To change the current situation, the new standards require high school teachers to adopt the student-centred method, in which students’ desire for independence and freedom for making their own decisions will be fully considered and satisfied. However, because the college entrance exam has not been changed to draw on the strengths of the new curriculum and because the exam remains as the only chance to decide whether or not they will be able to enrol in an ideal university, an event that can affect their fate henceforward, classroom teachers will have to balance exam preparation and applying new standards ideas in their classroom teaching. Understandably, exam-oriented education, in which passing exams is

considered as the goal, will become one of challenges for popularizing the new curriculum standards.

The project that this report describes is targeted at Chinese secondary schools, which is not compulsory education but it is paid for by local governments in some developed coastal areas. The choice of Chinese secondary schools has three implications. First, the implementation of the project will not be restricted by the limited-price policy of Chinese compulsory education. Secondly, senior high school students have acquired the basic vocabulary and grammar needed to effectively use the reading package. Beginning with the third grade in rural areas and the first grade in urban cities, Chinese students learn English. Upon graduation from middle school to secondary school they have studied English for seven to nine years and have mastered 1,500~1,600 words (ME, 2011: pp. 39). Finally, students are highly motivated to improve reading skills in order to pass their college entrance exam.

The project will be mainly focused on Orca Book Publishers and its potential partner: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

In 2012, British Columbia-based Orca Book Publishers celebrated its 10th anniversary of publishing high interest/low vocabulary fiction for reluctant readers, which have sold over one million copies in North America market so far. With a high expectation on the market growth in China, Orca Book Publishers has been making efforts to enter Chinese book market in the past seven years. It's particularly interested in finding a long-term business partner and working together to develop the school market. To serve the ELT (English Language Teaching) purpose, it's planning to launch a learning package based on its best-selling Hi-Lo fiction titles.

As a leading ELT publisher in China, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) has taken the school market as its core business in the past decade. The official launch of NECS means both challenge and opportunity for FLTRP because all textbook publishers will face a new round of intense competition over the market. FLTRP must try its best to secure and expand its market share and find more revenue sources. In the past year, FLTRP has been undergoing a business transition from a traditional publisher to an educational service provider. Its major philosophy behind developing

book products has changed from publishing the best product it can offer to customized publishing according to the needs of market. Putting it simply, it will move from “what” to “how”, aiming at offering solution to the teaching and learning of English language for Chinese teachers and students. Currently, FLTRP is launching an English reading campaign in order to promote leveled English reading in China. To accomplish this task, it has restructured its product line of English readers by using the concept of family tree. Using metadata such as target audience, reading levels, keywords, topics, the individual titles will be interrelated, enabling FLTRP to easily match suitable books to the needs of individual users.

Based on the common interest between two publishers, there are good chances for Orca Book Publishers to enter Chinese school market by publishing its Hi-Lo fiction along with relevant teaching resources in partnership with FLTRP. In the meantime, FLTRP will be able to introduce the practice and theory of English reading in North America to Chinese high schools by working with Orca Book Publishers and incorporating the Hi-Lo fiction into its product line for English reading campaign.

2. Analysis of English Reading Classes in Chinese Secondary Schools

Reading is one of the most important means of achieving quality education in the teaching of English at high schools. To a great extent, efficacious English reading determines whether the overall teaching is successful or not. According to NECS, the goal of senior high English teaching is to strengthen students' basic knowledge, and to develop their four basic language abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides being the primary means of exposure to the language, English reading is also "the main source of culture learning, vocabulary building, and the main form for the consolidation of grammar knowledge." (Chen Lin, 2012) Through reading, students' abilities to obtain and process information, and analyze and solve problems will be enhanced as well.

It is globally recognized that English reading is extraordinarily beneficial for improving English language competence. Dr. Neil Anderson (1999:p.1) claims that "reading is an essential skill for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) students; and for many, reading is the most important skill to master." According to Christine Nuttall (2002:p.128), the best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it. William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller (2005:p.2) claim that ESL reading ability "is already in great demand as English continues to spread, not only as a global language but also as the language of science, technology, and advanced research." The National English Curriculum Standards also stress the importance of cultivating senior students' reading ability and require students to achieve a high level in reading. In a word, reading in general and English reading in particular is a must-have skill for every student.

The importance of English reading is also reflected in various tests to enter post secondary education including the College English Test (better known as CET, a national, English-as-a-foreign-language test in the People's Republic of China), the

entrance exam for graduate schools, SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), TOEFL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language), and the IELTS (International English Language Testing System). These tests include a high number of questions that test for reading ability; students who are not reading well are unable to get high marks.

The new curriculum standards call for nine levels of English-language reading in accordance with language competence. In terms of reading amount, NECS has identified the reading goal for each level. Not including textbooks, the guidelines state that the accumulated amount of out-of-class reading should be over 180,000 words for Level 6, over 230,000 words for Level 7, and over 300,000 words for Level 8 (ME, 2003:pp.10-12). According to NECS, secondary school graduates must meet Level 8 requirements on vocabulary; specifically, they are expected to master about 3,300 words and 300~500 phrases and idioms. In addition, as described in China's Entrance Examination Outline, the candidates are required to have a command of around 3,600 words.

To most effectively teach English reading classes in Chinese secondary schools, it is crucial that we understand current issues and trends. The following analysis takes into account the perspective of teachers, students, and materials.

2.1. Teacher-related Issues

A key way to improve the effectiveness of English reading classes in secondary schools involves the teachers – they play a decisive role because they are living models of the power and joys of reading. It has been found that “the teachers who best motivate students to read independently are those who themselves read and who proactively talk with students about the importance of reading. If a teacher who has a solid relationship with a student models a love of reading, then that student is much more likely to read.”(Bill Clarke, 2006) At the core of any effective reading program is a teacher who truly believes that all students have the ability to become proficient readers. (Andrew, 2012) Students need “a teacher who understands reading instruction, adolescent development and motivation.” (Fisher & Frey 2008.)

2.1.1. Teaching Philosophy and Methods

The focus of English teaching described in the new standards is different from junior high to senior high. Skills of speaking and listening are stressed in middle schools, while reading and writing become the focus in secondary schools. (Shi Zhiqiong, 2011) However, the reality is that the traditional – and much less effective – grammar-translation method is still widely used by many teachers even today. The usual pattern of this teaching method is as follows: articles→grammar→translation→exercises. Such a method is unlikely to arouse and maintain the interest of students, to cultivate their life-long good reading habits, and to develop their abilities to find and solve problems, obtain and process information and learn independently. (Wang Qiuli, 2005) In order to conform to the requirements of National English Curriculum Standards, a student-centred approach is recommended, which will develop comprehensive language competence, promote cooperation and sharing, and enhance problem-solving skills.

2.1.2. Reading Strategies and Techniques

The objectives of teaching English reading in secondary schools are to cultivate reading strategies and language sense; and, in particular, to enhance the ability of students to obtain and process information. (ME, 2003:p.48) According to National English Curriculum Standards, the 14 basic reading skills required at senior high schools include: skimming, scanning, predicting, main ideas, facts and views, guessing, reasoning, major details, structure, table/figures, references, logic, author's tone, and evaluating. (ME, 2003:pp.48~49)

At present, many teachers still spend most of their time on specific materials but fail to offer proper training on students' reading techniques and strategies. As a consequence, students are poor at analyzing and solving problems and their skills of reasoning and judgement are not fully developed.(Qian Liran, 2011) In short, students are neither efficient nor effective readers.

NECS English reading class is a course for the training of skills. In daily teaching, teachers are expected to “focus on fostering students' reading skills and approaches instead of simply explaining points of language or raising questions for students to answer. Obviously, students need to apply different reading methods and skills to

different materials and purposes. For example, novels are not read as if one were searching for telephone numbers; and professional books are not dealt with the same way that a newspaper is browsed. Thus, it is useful for students to employ various strategies and techniques appropriate to different types and purposes of reading.” (Wang Qiuli, 2005) Successful reading results from cultivating good reading habits and mastering scientific reading strategies and techniques, thus making reading a life-long habit and ability.

2.1.3. Assessment Method

For most secondary schools, the evaluation of students is usually based on their test performance rather than on their performance in class. Therefore, the major problem with the current evaluation system is “the overemphasis on the summative evaluation and much negligence on formative evaluation.” (Lu, 2004:p.60) Under such circumstance, students do not receive feedback from their teachers on a regular basis. Such a methodology does not conform with good practise. Andrew (2012, p. 1) argues that “instruction must be driven by assessment and explicit, immediate and ongoing feedback is required to improve student learning.” Since individual readers learn at a different pace, it is critical to map a student's progress and provide feedback in a timely manner to maximize the learning process. (Dori Veto, 2006)

NECS also points out that assessment should be beneficial to students' self-cognition. The assessment process is expected to build students' confidence, stay reflective, and enable them to adjust their learning process. It is the responsibility of teachers to help students realize the role of self-evaluation in the development of learning abilities, and command the methods of self-evaluation. When English-curriculum students are evaluated, not only their skills but also their learning methods and habits, and their mood and attitude are evaluated – all of which are reflected in the learning process. In addition, a variety of assessment methods will be welcomed.

2.2. Student-related Issues

2.2.1. *Linguistic Knowledge and Competence*

Although English reading is a complex process involving many aspects, the direct barriers for students arise from their poor linguistic knowledge and competence. Specifically, new words can prove to be immediate difficulties and make students feel upset, thus losing confidence and interest in reading. (Shi Zhiqiong, 2011)

A large percentage of Chinese-language students also have trouble understanding syntax. As a result of poor and unsystematic command of grammar, many students are unable to make out the exact meaning when several complex sentences are placed together. For example, it can be hard for them to understand the modifying relationship and structure. Furthermore, a couple of special sentence structures – such as omission, separation, inversion, and partial negation – can also make comprehension difficult. (Shi Zhiqiong, 2011) More often than not, students complain that they have difficulties in learning vocabulary and grammar even if they have devoted a large amount of time and energy to it. (Wu Qing, 2009) In addition, unfamiliarity with text structures can further hinder their understanding. (Qian Liran, 2011)

2.2.2. *Intelligence Factors*

Different levels of intelligence among students result in varied reading levels. For example, some students are poor in reading retention. As a result, they usually forget a book's earlier information when reading farther along. Some students have difficulties forming a mental picture of what has been written. Others cannot use their prior knowledge and experiences to understand the content of articles. And some students are short of an associative capability that would allow them to relate one thing with another. (Qian Liran, 2011)

2.2.3. *Non-intelligence Factors*

Non-intelligence factors include motivation, interest, perseverance, attitude, and habits. (Qian Liran, 2011) Harmer describes motivation as “some kind of ‘internal drive’

that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action.” (Harmer 1991:3) Motivation can be divided into two types: internal or intrinsic motivation, and external or extrinsic motivation. Internal motivation factors include the student’s physical condition, as well as the teacher’s teaching methods, personal charm, and success. The most important factor affecting external motivation is the students’ attitude toward the target language. (Xu Tangfa, 2007)

Often, Chinese students study English only to be able to pass the exam. As we all know, motivation plays a crucial part in learning activities. If students are not properly motivated, it will be hard for them to concentrate on reading. (Qian Liran, 2011) Some students are keen at the very beginning but start losing interest as the text gets tougher; other students often feel too nervous and anxious to read fluently. In addition, some students only immerse themselves in their favorite types of articles, thereby limiting their acquisition of the full range of reading skills. (Qian Liran, 2011)

Grade 10 is a crucial year for students in terms of their reading ability. At this key transitional grade, in order to improve speed and comprehension, it is of great importance that students cultivate good reading habits. Bad habits affecting reading speed include regression (or called “Skip-Back,” the backward movement of the eyes over information that it has previously considered. It is a bad habit that slows down the pace of reading), pronouncing words during reading, finger-guided reading, and translation-based reading. (Wu Qing, 2009) The key to reading comprehension lies in the overall command of the material being read rather than being overly concerned with single words or expressions. In the process of reading, it is essential that students be aware of the role and contributions of topic sentences, structures, main ideas, views, and purposes.

According to Christine Nuttall (2002: p.127), the vicious circle of the weak reader is “doesn’t understand→reads slowly→doesn’t enjoy reading→doesn’t read much”; in contrast, the virtuous circle of the good reader is “enjoy reading→reads faster→reads more→understands better.”

2.3. Material-related issues

2.3.1. Choice of Reading Materials

In English teaching, the appropriate selection of learning materials is particularly important because “if the reading text is especially interesting and engaging, acquisition is likely to be even more successful.” (Harmer, 1998.) Students who are allowed to choose their own reading texts tend to put forward more effort into learning and understanding the materials (Schiefele, 1991). In fact, choice is a proven motivator for reluctant readers who seem to need extra encouragement. Offering a variety of content to students so they can easily move to an area or topic that interests them reduces the risk of disengaging the student with a single text they find uninteresting. (Dori Veto, 2006)

NECS puts forward a couple of suggestions on choosing appropriate materials. Reading materials should be “related to students’ life and their language proficiency; extensive in topics and various in text types; conceptual, interesting, informative, challenging and current.” (ME, 2003: pp. 30-31.) Harmer also points out that “A balance has to be struck between real English on the one hand and the students’ capabilities and interests on the other.” (Harmer, 1998: p. 69) As well, Harmer has this to say:

Reading texts also provide good models for English writing. When we teach the skill of writing, we will need to show students models of what we are encouraging them to do. Reading texts also provide opportunities to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and texts. Lastly, good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, excite imaginative response and be the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons. (Harmer, 1998: p. 68)

The materials must be neither too difficult nor too easy to understand. It is better to be a little bit beyond the learner’s current level.(Wu Qing, 2009)

In terms of selecting materials, the frequent challenges for secondary school students include: difficult and overly-long materials that are beyond students’ reading level; outmoded and impractical themes that bore students and discourage further reading. (Qian Liran ,2011)

Adolescents who are now 16 and 17 were born during the commercial launch of the World Wide Web in 1995. The Net-generation is growing up with digital media all around them. The N-Geners work, learn, and play with computers, video games, cell phones, DVDs, and other digital media (Tapscott, 1999). The Internet has also become an important tool for learning and socializing. (Teen Research Unlimited, 1999). Gambrell (2006) stipulates three ways in which technology can foster reading engagement: (1) access to reading materials, (2) opportunities for self-selection, and (3) social interactions about text. This familiarity with digital media suggests that multi-media formats might help students learn in the classroom, including printed materials, ebooks, and digital versions. To offer more choices, it is necessary that the learning content is made accessible via desktop computers, notebooks, smartphones, iPads, Kindles, Nook, Hanwang, Banbook, and other handheld devices.

2.3.2. *Design of Reading Tasks and Exercises*

When it comes to the design of reading tasks, Harmer suggests that teachers should “match the task to the topic” because “the most interesting text can be undermined by asking boring and inappropriate questions; the most commonplace passage can be made really exciting with imaginative and challenging tasks.” He further points out that “students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text, not just to the language.... It is especially important that they should be allowed to express their feelings about the topic – thus provoking personal engagement with it and the language.” (Harmer, 1998: p.70) Therefore, reading tasks and exercises are designed not only to increase comprehension, but also to serve the purposes of cultivating critical thinking and developing related language skills like writing and presenting.

In most language exams today in China, reading comprehension is tested quite consistently: several questions will be set after each passage and four options offered for each question. The test is meant to check students' reading comprehension and overall language competence. However, in practise, the listed options are rather subjective and allow a good chance for making a correct guess, which will harm the reliability of the test. (Xu Tangfa, 2007)

For the sake of convenient use in classroom, the link between reading tasks and the curriculum will help teachers and students better understand the desired learning outcomes. It is also pointed out in NECS that “teaching activities need to play an active part in promoting mutual penetration and connection between English and other disciplines.” (ME, 2003: p.23) By applying what they have learned in other subjects, their command of knowledge will be consolidated. Next, when the design is related to the student’s life, age-appropriate activities will help students develop their problem-solving skills in real life and extend their life experience. Last but not least, a student’s writing and presenting skills will be enhanced by studying rhetorical devices the authors have employed in the text. If individual and group work are combined in reading tasks, a balance between coordination and independent thinking will be achieved. These reading activities can include project reports, reader theatre, character letters, and book reviews etc.

3. Orca Book and Its Hi-Lo Fiction for Reluctant Readers

3.1. A Brief History of Orca Book Publishers

Founded in 1984, Orca Book Publishers is one of Canada's leading publishers of books for young readers. In the past 28 years, it has established an excellent reputation throughout North America for publishing high quality children's books, including baby board books; hardcover, high-quality picture books; early chapter books in the Orca Echoes and Orca Young Readers series; novels for the reluctant reader in the Orca Currents, Orca Sports and Orca Soundings series; standalone juvenile fiction and teen novels; and nonfiction. Orca publishes approximately 70 new titles per year and has more than 500 titles in its backlist. Just some of the bestselling authors published by Orca Book Publishers include Norah McClintock, Eric Walters, John Wilson, Andrea Spalding, and Sigmund Brouwer.

In the digital age, Orca continues to embrace technological change: all its titles are now made available in multiple digital formats for reading on a variety of devices. Orca titles are available electronically through Amazon, Overdrive, Sony, the Apple Store, the Orca website, and many other places. Collections of titles are also available on a subscription basis through various services including the Tumble Readables online database and through Big Timber Media and the Canadian Electronic Library. Always looking for new directions, Orca is working with several App developers to bring its picture books and board books to the digital realm. Many Orca titles are now produced in audio format and are available on the *Go Reader* audio device from Book Buddy as well as from other sources. Along with the books themselves, Orca is active in producing accompanying resource materials such as teachers' guides, complementary websites, and online materials. Always looking ahead, Orca Book Publishers is continually changing and growing as it finds new ways to reach more readers.

3.2. The Development of Hi-Lo Books

3.2.1. Definition and Features

A Hi-Lo book (meaning: high interest and low vocabulary) is, broadly defined, a title that offers highly interesting subject matter at a low reading level. (Shannon Maughan, 2012) These Hi-Lo books address so-called reluctant readers. The phrase “reluctant reader” is an umbrella term used in educational and related literature to denote a child who does not or cannot read, and who is likely to avoid reading. (Annette Earl and Sally Maynard, 2006) Moorefield, a teacher, asserts that reluctant readers may be classified “into three categories: those who can’t read, don’t read, and won’t read.” (Moorefield, 2004)

According to the 2009 Nation's Report Card/National Assessment of Educational Progress, only one third of Grade eight students in the U.S. read at or above the proficient level for their age. In order to help the astonishingly large population of struggling students who read below that level, the use of Hi-Lo reading materials has become very common in the United States.

For reluctant readers, the key issue is confidence. As Worthy explains: “Students who have continually met with failure see reading as the enemy. For struggling readers, then, the first focus of instruction should be to rebuild their damaged self-concepts through motivation” (Worthy, 1996: p. 204) Crucially, in order to overcome their reluctance, it is essential that such readers be encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards reading and learn to regard it as fun. Eventually they will come to accept responsibility for their reading.

Effective Hi-Lo fiction features strong, realistic protagonists that the reader cares about. Exciting plots and interesting themes are also key elements. The subject matter should be relevant and sometimes controversial, which enables the reader to become emotionally invested. The dialogue is authentic, lively, and varied. Vocabulary and sentence structure are accessible without being patronizing through oversimplification. (Andrew Wooldridge, 2012)

There are several other features of Hi-Lo books, including age-appropriate content that will grab readers' interest at an accessible readability level, thus satisfying the needs for teens to read about themselves and relate. In order to help struggling readers focus, Hi-Lo books typically include design elements such as larger white-space borders around the text on the pages, looser leading between lines, a slightly larger type size, clear visual images, and paper that's a creamier, not brighter, white. In order to increase a reader's confidence, Hi-Lo books are usually short. However, to avoid the appearance of being "baby books," Hi-Lo books are often produced in a mass-market paperback size with edgy photographic images on the front. A mass-market paperback is a small, usually non-illustrated, and less-expensive bookbinding format. Hi-Lo books favour "hot topics" such as sports, mystery, adventure, animals, and natural disasters. Struggling teen readers often seek out books that depict characters in gritty, realistic circumstances and situations. As a result, a growing number of Hi-Lo books address issues like bullying, suicide, gangs, drug use, sexuality, and teen pregnancy. (Shannon Maughan, 2012)

3.2.2. *Grading Criteria*

Reluctant readers are often at different reading levels. Therefore, it's important that they are offered an easy-to-use guide to locate appropriate reading materials. Publishers are aware of this and use multiple methods to address this need. Subjective and objective measures can both be used to determine a reading level that is proper for the content and also for its intended audience. For example, some editors can incorporate their expertise as former reading teachers and use their editorial sensibility to control the readability of Hi-Lo books – including controlled vocabulary, dialogue, simpler sentences, short chapters, and short episodes in the plot.

As far as objective measures are concerned, a couple of readability formulas are in wide use and are employed with the help of computer software programs. For example, there are the Elesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Test and the Fry Graph Readability formula, which assign reading levels based on a calculation of the average number of sentences and syllables per one hundred words. Other systems include Lexile levels (where a text is analyzed by MetaMetrics software), as well as Fountas and Pinnell's Guided Reading Levels and Accelerated Reader (AR) program levels by

Renaissance Learning. Please be aware that this readability formula is not truly exact because it does not take into account difficult concepts or constructs or the sophistication of the content. Therefore, it is meant to be no more than a guideline for teachers.

3.3. Orca's Hi-Lo Fiction

In response to requests from teachers and librarians for books that appeal to teen reluctant readers, the series, Orca Soundings, was developed in 2002. The goal was to develop a series that fosters an appreciation for reading and motivates students to move on to more challenging books. The reading levels fall between grade 2.0 and grade 4.5, which is assigned by using The Fry Readability Formula. The formula depends on the vocabulary and sentence structure of the text, not the organization or content. The grade reading level is found by plotting the average number of sentences and syllables in each 100-word segment on the Fry Readability Graph, which measures reading levels from first grade to college years. Therefore, 2.0 would be someone reading at the appropriate level for just starting second grade, while 4.5 would refer to someone reading at a level that is appropriate for someone who is halfway through fourth grade.

With the success of the Orca Soundings, other series were published for reluctant readers in middle school (Orca Currents), for students interested in sports (Orca Sports) and for adults (Rapid Reads).

Hi-Lo books from Orca Book Publishers are short, high-interest novels, written at a lower reading level but with age-appropriate plots, characters, and storylines. These books feature linear plots, clear context, limited vocabulary, few characters, and no flashbacks or confusing constructs or situations, all of which help bring down the difficulty level.

Orca's contemporary and engaging themes can arouse student's personal interests and extend their thinking, thus allowing them to make meaningful connections with literature. As well, appropriate at-level materials encourage reluctant and struggling readers to use their present skills to complete reading the book. This success instills

confidence, encourages further reading, and can be a catalyst for improved student behavior. Quality fiction that supports students at their current reading level provides the best opportunity to motivate them to read more and increase related skills. The more than 160 titles in Orca's three series can appeal to diverse interests while simultaneously fulfilling the need of students to be able to self-select appropriate material and to learn to read at their own pace. Independent reading can also teach them that reading is enjoyable and rewarding.

Orca's Hi-Lo fiction cover a wide range of subjects, including bullying/violence, drugs/rehabilitation, family issues/relationships, friendship, loss/abandonment, overcoming challenges, peer pressure, racism/prejudice, and self-acceptance/discovery. Their themes involve community, betrayal, love/romance, self-acceptance/discovery, truth, online relationships, crime, jealousy, immigrants, responsibility, racism, mystery, grief, gambling, loyalty, and fraud.

4. Orca's ELT Reading Package for Secondary Schools in China

4.1. What is Orca's ELT Reading Package?

In order to meet the demand of NECS, Orca's ELT Reading Package is particularly tailored for the Chinese secondary school market and meticulously designed for ELT purposes. The package includes 24 contemporary novels written by award-winning authors. The difficulty level for all titles falls between grade 2.0 and grade 4.5, which is appropriate for Chinese secondary school students.

To satisfy the teaching needs of English reading skills, Orca's ELT Reading Package will be exclusively selected from the Currents series. Compared with other series, Currents is considered as an ideal choice for Chinese school market on the basis of the following four reasons: first, it is targeted at ages 10+ and covers Chinese students from middle schools through secondary schools. In terms of age-appropriate content, the interest level of Orca's ELT Reading Package for secondary schools is for ages 15 and up, which works well with Grade 10 and Grade 11 students in China. Currents series has a collection of 58 titles; and four more new titles will be added every year. Except for 24 titles chosen for the secondary package, the rest of titles with the protagonist and the antagonist aged 12 to 14 can be saved for the junior high school reading packages in the future. Secondly, this series has been on the market for several years and favored by many classroom teachers in North America. Therefore, it is quite easy to collect assignment samples from students for the future online sharing platform and find experienced lecturer candidates for teachers development training program. Thirdly, the contemporary stories and cultural issues contained in these books will appeal to students. Just to name a few examples. See *No Evil* involves the themes of gang violence and honesty while *Blob* touches upon the issues of self-image and obesity. Lastly, it is originally designed to be read and comprehended by the middle school

students in North America. Accordingly, its resource guide contains more content and activities to use in the classroom.

As a matter of fact, in order to assist school teachers in their classroom teaching, Orca Book Publishers has developed rich teaching resources for Orca Currents series in the past decade, including:

- A free teachers' online guide for individual titles, including a summary; writing and research activities; elements of the novel; discussion questions; and tools used by writers.

- A complete resource guide (also available on CD) that provides information on using the books as part of the classroom curriculum. The content covers book summary; pre-reading ideas; curriculum connections (science, psychology, history, social studies, computer science, math, law, business, art, writing, journalism, film studies/fine arts, language, media studies, geography/geology, chemistry, literature, environmental studies), students connections (discussion questions; author's notes; resources; author biography; author website); and text connections (character, theme, plot, title, vocabulary, setting). Additional information on reading levels, literature circles, and assessment is also included.

- Go Reader. This is a portable, pre-loaded MP3 audio device. There are two unabridged audio books on each Go Reader. Orca Currents volume 1 to volume 3 is priced at \$49.95 for each, including six books: *See No Evil*, *Dog Walker*, *Skate Freak*, *Sewer Rats*, *Chat Room*, and *Mirror Image*.

- Text2Reader (<http://text2reader.com/>). This is a monthly language arts program for grades 6 to 8. Launched in 2011, this new middle-school language arts program is proving popular with teachers looking for new classroom resources. It was awarded Best of 2011 Professional Resources by *Resource Links Magazine*. It offers high-quality reading selections from award-winning books as well as engaging activities to help students make meaning from what they read with relevant passages that connect to their own lives. To assist teachers, it's packaged with a number of easy-to-use, teacher-created comprehension exercises, reading and writing activities, assessments, and opportunities for enrichment – all directly tied to English Language Arts (ELA)

learning outcomes for BC, Ontario, and the US Common Core standards. Available with an annual subscription, this affordable, accessible program marks a new direction for Orca as the educational market grows in importance.

- Reaching Reluctant Readers website. This is a site for educators who work with reluctant readers, and it offers resources like teaching ideas, quizzes and reading levels, literature circles, balanced reading programs, and reader theater. Also included are research information such as terms and classifications, reading strategies, more specialized resources targeting male reluctant readers, external links, and books to grab reluctant readers that include tips on how to use them in the classroom.

Clearly, the above listed print and online resources will lay a solid foundation, on which the project of Orca's ELT Reading Package could adapt and develop its own teaching materials. Teachers who adopt the package will be given guidance on how to deliver an effective reading class. The design of the materials is intended to motivate the students to achieve the NECS's objective on the out-of-class accumulative reading of 300,000 words. The simple math is: with a total of approximately 15,000 words for each title, students will read about 360,000 words if they finish 24 titles in the package. All going well, they will discover the joy of reading, develop combined skills of reading, presenting and writing, and become an independent fluent reader and lifelong learner.

In the context of National English Curriculum Standards, Orca's ELT reading package addresses the following key issues:

- For high school teachers, there is hands-on guidance for applying new concepts in daily teaching at an operating level;
- the package includes practical instruction on organizing student-centred classes and activities that promote effective reading;
- there are well-designed and highly engaging reading tasks and exercises for developing both language skills and real-life problem-solving skills;
- also included are easy-to-follow assessment and self-evaluation procedures for measuring progress.

Because the students are in high school, Orca's ELT series uses contemporary themes relating to students' personal life to immediately engage readers with compelling stories about interesting characters in contemporary settings. The package also includes a variety of Hi-Lo graded readers written by award-winning authors to satisfy the needs of different students. There is a match between cognitive level and language difficulty: this helps build readers' self-confidence and the ability to discover the joy of reading. Portable audio components for learning correct pronunciation and understanding idioms are also included. And additional novels for extra practice are readily available in ebook format.

4.2. Position Statement

The package presents a well-integrated solution for secondary school English reading class in context of NECS. Orca's Hi-Lo fiction is originally designed to address the issue of reluctant readers in English context in which students get access to a large English language vocabulary. However, when introduced to Chinese secondary school market, it makes sense for the whole student population for the purpose of learning English as an additional language. Therefore, the term of reluctant reader is deliberately avoided in the publishing and marketing plan.

4.3. Target Audience

Foreign language schools, large English training institutions, and international classes in key secondary schools in China have been targeted by Orca as an ideal entry point for the Chinese secondary school market based on the following three considerations. First, being free of the restrictions placed on the public education system, they are more market-driven, open to new concepts, and free to start new training programs. Secondly, being staffed with qualified high-level teachers and equipped with established service platforms, they have the capability to promote and implement the project in an effective way. Lastly, their students are planning to study abroad in the future and have a relatively higher consuming power. Therefore, they have the impetus to acquire reading strategies and skills in order to prepare themselves to be confident

and fluent readers in the post-secondary academic context. Also, they can afford the reading package.

According to the national statistics in 2009, there are 14,607 ordinary secondary schools and 24.34 million enrolled students across the country. Undoubtedly, it is a huge market. Ordinary secondary schools always keep an eye on key schools. If Orca's ELT Reading Package is used by key local secondary schools or foreign language schools in daily teaching, it is highly possible that ordinary secondary schools will follow suit and this model will be copied in the public school system. As a result, Orca's ELT reading package will eventually seize an ever-greater market share as it continues to reach more readers in ordinary secondary schools.

4.4. Business Partner Selection

Orca's ELT Reading Package presents a useful tool to the challenges of teaching English reading at the secondary school level in China. To achieve this goal, it is ideal that the long-term business partner could possess the following comprehensive set of capabilities. Firstly, the partner needs to be an advocate and practitioner of national English curriculum standards. Secondly, it must enjoy high brand awareness and a good reputation among high school teachers and students. Lastly, it needs to be able to easily navigate the school market in China in order to reach classroom teachers. Textbook publishers for primary and high schools will be preferred. For the above prerequisites, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press comes into sight as a potential business partner in China.

Founded in 1979 by Beijing Foreign Studies University, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) has since grown into the largest ELT publisher and university press in China, ranking third in sales turnover among all the publishing houses in China. FLTRP aims to develop into a comprehensive provider of educational services by strengthening publishing as its core business while expanding into the fields of educational training and relevant information services.

In the spring of 1999, the Basic Education Publishing (BEP) of FLTRP was set up. Following the principle of "publishing high-quality books, carrying out research in

teaching methodology and promoting educational reform,” BEP has developed the capabilities of editing, marketing, teacher training, and information service. Starting from textbook publishing, BEP has established a multi-level publishing structure with various resources and multimedia products for basic education. The New Standard English Series, the first complete set of course books from primary school, through to middle and secondary school compiled in accordance with the National English Curriculum Standards in China, was published in cooperation with Macmillan Education. The textbooks have been used by 25 million students annually in more than 20 provinces across the nation and have enjoyed high prestige amongst their target users. In terms of market share, its English textbook for secondary schools has taken over half of the school market; primary and middle schools have about one third of market share.

FLTRP is clearly a first choice as a partner for Orca’s ELT Reading package because FLTRP has the capabilities to publish high-quality books, promote the package within the school market, and offer teacher-training services. In addition, FLTRP enjoys an excellent credit of international cooperation with foreign publishers, both big and small.

After initial contacts and a face-to-face product presentation, FLTRP expressed its intention to work on this project and demanded a detailed publishing and marketing plan and related sample books for review purpose. To assist with FLTRP’s editorial decision-making procedure, Orca has submitted 24 titles along with the resource guide, Go Reader MP3 device, teaching tips and classroom project samples. Once the project is approved by the editorial committee, two parties will move on to the stage of contract negotiation and define responsibilities for each party.

4.5. Competition in the Market for English Graded Readers

In the past 30 years, China has witnessed a booming market for English-language learning. The publishing of English readers has been quite lucrative. However, because there are so many publishers currently in the field, the number of sales that each individual publisher makes has declined for reader at all levles. Consequently,

Chinese publishers tend to be a bit conservative when deciding new projects targeted at this market.

English “leveled reading” removes “the one size fits all” approach to reading, giving each student the opportunity to develop essential skills at his or her own pace. With leveled reading, students are usually placed in a group with other classmates who read at roughly the same level of ability. Rather than having the entire class read the same book (which some students might find too hard and some too easy), leveled reading allows teachers to use a more personalized and precise approach to monitor a student's progress and help him or her learn to read. Although English leveled reading is developed in western countries, China is still in its infant stage in this regard. The direct copying of leveled reading to the Chinese market is not feasible. Chinese secondary school students usually cannot read as well as their counterparts in North America or Britain. Many publications fail because they do not adequately address the need to match cognitive level and language difficulty. Another frequent concern is that teachers are not provided with adequate resources support and teaching guidance. As a result, these books are very replaceable in the market and do not enjoy high customer loyalty.

4.5.1. Readers with Simplified Language and Vocabulary Control

In order to satisfy the needs of ELT, foreign publishers lower the language difficulty by simplifying classic readers with controlled vocabulary. However, the plot and humor of the original stories are retained to motivate students. When these books are introduced to China's market, Chinese publishers offer translation or annotation for reference. The typical examples include *The Oxford Bookworm* and *Short Stories for Comprehension*. *The Oxford Bookworm* was published by FLTRP and Oxford University Press (OUP) in 1997. Up till now, the series has sold more than 50 million copies and *Bookworm* has become a household name. Most of its titles are English classic readers that have been simplified by native experts. It has six reading levels with graduated vocabulary levels of 300, 600, 1000, 1500, 2000 and 2300 words. So far, the list includes 68 titles. The success of the *Bookworm* series lies mainly in its low-price strategy and quality content. When launched initially, most titles were priced around three to five *Yuan*. The topics of classic readers do not become outdated easily and can suit a wide audience, from primary school to adult. Good word-of-mouth, spread across

generations, has helped guarantee strong sales for a long period of time. *Short Stories for Comprehension* were published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press and Longman in 1996. The series has 12 titles and targets primary to high school students. Each title includes a collection of 15~20 interesting stories with illustrations.

Undeniably, this type of reader has achieved great success in the market. It is also true that the international fame of original authors, quality content, plot construct, characterization and writing technique themselves are good selling points. In terms of marketing efforts, the publishers can save time and energy telling their target audience who these authors are and what these books are about. It is easy to understand why this low-risk publishing model has long been favoured by many Chinese publishers. However, since most copyrights of classic works have already entered the public domain, there are always various editions of the works competing each other in the market. In order to gain the competitive edge and generate more orders, publishers consistently adjust their packing and pricing strategies. Intense competition between publishers will naturally lead to an overall decline of sales for each edition.

Another drawback is associated with the weak support for NECS. The above-mentioned bestsellers have been in the market for about 15 years, long before NECS was released. Consequently, they are not supportive in terms of implementing NECS concepts. Although these universal topics can survive a long period of time, they are not related to the contemporary life of young people and are unable to increase students' skills for solving real-life issues. In a sense, Orca's ELT Reading Package is intended to create a new publishing model, featuring contemporary themes, cultural issues, age-appropriate plots, characters, modern methodologies for the teaching of English reading in accordance with NECS. Orca's package encourages critical thinking, develop problem-solving skills as well as language acquisition. One more unique selling point worth mentioning is that authors of Orca's ELT Reading Package are still living among us and active with their social media such as blog, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. If desired, students can easily follow their pages, learn their updates and share thoughts directly with the authors or other readers who love the same books. This unique reading experience is obviously superior to that of simplified classic readers. Therefore, the market potential for Orca's Hi-Lo fiction is promising.

4.5.2. The Joint Publishing Projects

There are some joint publishing projects between Chinese and foreign publishers currently underway. Chinese publishers work out the outline and topics and take responsibility for vocabulary control, passage length, and the design of exercises; the foreign publisher-partners are responsible for producing original source texts. The copyright is shared between Chinese and foreign publishers. NECS dictates that there are 24 topics that students need to learn about. Books that are co-produced by Chinese and foreign publishers are compiled in accordance with NECS guidelines; therefore, it saves time for teachers to look up topic-related reading materials. Two examples of joint publishing include *Readaholic* (2007), a series published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and Heinemann; and *Reading for Pleasure* (2008), co-published by Yilin Press and Pearson Education.

Compared with simplified classic works, the joint publishing project is a great leap forward, which has emerged within the context of promoting English reading in accordance with NECS. In terms of material selection, it contains contemporary themes, vivid language, real-life stories and reflects the pop culture, value and taste of young people. Usually, joint publishing projects contain a collection of short passages of various styles and disciplines, which could well satisfy the NECS requirements on the reading materials that should be “extensive in topics and various in text types”. Students can make full use of their fragmented time to finish reading a short passage within five to seven minutes, which is a good training for improving exam skills.

Once again, there is a drawback in the usual form of such materials. Although the topic-based reading passages of the joint project are well matched with the age and reading levels of the English class, the overall design is exam-oriented. Therefore, these books are not ideal for students in terms of helping them develop interest, build confidence, take pleasure in reading, and become a lifelong learner. Comparatively speaking, the strength of Orca’s Hi-Lo fiction lies in its contemporary themes and cultural issues. The complete set of age-appropriate characters in North America is more appealing to students and encourages them to read further. Besides the language input, the package will help cultivate other strategies and skills required by NECS. To be specific, the writing and presenting skills of students will be significantly enhanced by

accomplishing the class projects recommended in the package and participating in-group discussions.

Of course, as a new publishing mode, Orca's ELT Reading Package also faces some market risks. First of all, some themes covered in the series such as school gangs, teen pregnancy, drug abuse are not positive in the eyes of Chinese teachers, parents and school administrators. Therefore, due attention should be paid to this aspect when the project manager selects materials. Next, as Chinese readers are not familiar with Canadian best-selling authors, great efforts need to be made to promote market recognition of these authors and their works. Last but not least, Chinese secondary school students are extremely stressed under the pressure of college entrance exam. Consequently, the time allotted in English subject, English reading in particular, is relatively limited. To guarantee the reading time, attention should be paid to changing the attitudes of Chinese educators with regard to English reading. When they realize the importance of English reading, alter the teaching models and add extra class hours, the project will be better put into practice and more likely to achieve the desired effect and improved outcomes.

4.6. Dual Benefit Analysis

In terms of social benefit, as a leading ELT publisher and major English textbook player, FLTRP has been active in promoting and implementing new concepts of NECS. Nowadays, it is a widely recognized notion that reading leads to success. By publishing Orca's ELT Reading Package, FLTRP will establish a new benchmark for graded readers in the context of NECS. The package will build its reputation by providing operational guidance for applying new ideas in daily teaching. The online sharing platform will serve as a bridge between Chinese high school students and teachers and their counterparts in Canada/USA. Through interaction and activities with peers, optimum learning will be achieved in a social networking environment. Motivation theories have emphasized that learning can be facilitated through social interaction with others. Sharing ideas and exchanging views with others about world events, books, neighborhoods, or other common interests are important to keep learners engaged. (Chou, 2008)

As far as economic benefit is concerned, sales of the Students' Pack are estimated to reach 8,000 in the first year, with sales of 12,000 and 15,000 sets for the following two years. If the pack is priced at ¥ 399, total sales will amount to ¥13,965,000. For the Teachers' Resource Pack, a price of ¥599 and sales of 4,000 sets in the first three years will yield a total of ¥2,396,000. And then there is the teachers' development training program. Over a three-year period, Orca and FLTRP will hold a workshop every summer, which will cover at least 300 secondary school English teachers in total. If the tuition is ¥3,000 per person the training income will be ¥900,000. Putting everything together, the total sales will be ¥17,261,000. This presumes the following financial arrangement between the two parties: Orca Book Publishers receives a royalty rate of 8% of the list price for each package sold by FLTRP; and Orca and FLTRP split equally the net profit of the all-expenses-paid teachers' training program. The following sample P&L details the estimated gains for two publishers in terms of Students' Pack.

Table 1. The Sample Title P&L of Students' Pack

Title: Orca's ELT Reading Package(Students' Pack)
Format: Trade Pap. **Price:** ¥399 **Author:** Eric Walter etc.
Season: Summer, 2013 **Advance:** ¥150,000 **Currency:** Renminbi(yuan)

	Special/Bulk	Trade Retail/Whole	Website
Gross Units	17,500	7,000	10,500
Minus Returns(Units)	0	350	525
Net Units	17,500	6,650	9,975
Retail Price	¥399	¥399	¥399
Gross Yuan	¥6,982,500	¥2,653,350	¥3,980,025
Discount(55%AVG)	¥3,840,375	¥1,459,342.5	¥2,189,013.7
Revenues			
Other Pub Inc.PUB(rights, Misc)	¥0	¥0	¥0
Total Revenue	¥3,840,375	¥1,459,342.5	¥2,189,013.7
Less Cost of Goods:			
Development Costs	¥1,012,900	¥248,766	¥373,149
Paper, Printing, Binding	¥498,750	¥199,500	¥299,250
Royalties(8%)	¥558,600	¥212,268	¥318,402
Freight In(2%)	¥139,650	¥53,067	¥79,600.5
Total Cost of Goods	¥2,209,900	¥713,601	¥1,070,401.5

	Special/Bulk	Trade Retail/Whole	Website
Gross Margin	¥1,630,475	¥745,741.5	¥1,118,612.2
Less Provisions			
BAD DEBT(1%)	¥38,403.75	¥14,593.43	¥21,890.14
AUTHOR ADVANCE W/O			
INVENTORY W/O(3%)	¥115,211.25	¥43,780.28	¥65,670.41
TOTAL PROVISIONS	¥153,615	¥58,373.71	¥87,560.55
GROSS PROFIT	¥1,476,860	¥687,367.79	¥1,031,051.7
DIRECT COSTS			
SALES COMMISSIONS	¥0	¥0	¥0
MARKETING COSTS	¥192,018.75	¥72,967.13	¥109,450.68
WAREHOUSE&FULFILLMENT	¥0	¥0	¥0
RENT	¥0	¥0	¥0
TELEPHONES	¥0	¥0	¥0
SALARIES	¥0	¥0	¥0
ALLOCATION 10%	¥384,037.5	¥145,934.25	¥218,901.37
TOTAL G&A	¥576,056.25	¥218,901.38	¥328,352.05
CONTRIBUTION TO PROFIT	¥900,803.8	¥468,466.41	¥702,699.7

4.7. Packing and Pricing Strategy

4.7.1. *Students' Pack*

- **24 novels** for Grade 10 and Grade 11 will be included, 12 novels for each grade. These are written by award-winning authors, and immediately engage the reader with compelling stories about interesting characters in contemporary settings. The reading will be scheduled within a 24-month period.

- **1 workbook** is included. It will offer reading tasks and exercises, as well as a self-managing reading plan, a check for comprehension, and a handy guide for recording dialectical journals, classroom projects, and literature circles discussions.

- **Go Reader.** This is a portable, pre-loaded MP3 audio device that contains 24 unabridged audio books. It requires no downloads, CDs, or cassettes and includes batteries and headphones. Students simply hit the Play button and start listening. It is an ideal way for students to sharpen their listening comprehension and improve pronunciation. It is also designed so that students cannot easily pirate materials contained on the MP3 players.

- **Suggested Pricing:** ¥399

- **Suggested Publication Date:** June 1, 2013

4.7.2. *Teachers' Resource Pack*

- **24 novels:** Teachers get their own copies of the books meant for their students.

- **The Teaching Guide (with CD).** The guide will enable teachers to use Orca's ELT Reading Package in the classroom, including a summary, curriculum connections, writing and research activities, elements of the novel, discussion questions, and tools used by writers. The activities in these guides will allow students to study the novels while gaining a deeper understanding of how the text relates to their lives and to the society in which they live. The guide will also offer classroom teaching ideas like reading workshop—individual silent reading, literature circles, book discussion groups, modeling responses to literature, written preparation for literature circles discussion, dialectical journals, group sharing, and culminating activities. There are also guides to informal and formal assessment; creating a reading program; reading strategies; classroom projects (such as character letter, letter to author, alternate book ending, student recommendations of book, coat of arms, six word memoir, file folder book report, mobile book report, and visual story), and tips for developing a reader's theatre script.

- **1 MP3 CD.** This includes audio files of all 24 titles.

- **Text2Reader.** This is a supplementary book in a ring-binder, one for each grade. This affordable and accessible program can be a source of additional reading materials to demonstrate and teach related skills. It has integrated concepts from

disciplines such as math, social studies, science and health and also contains digital nation, readers theatre, ready-to-go assessment rubrics, and a checklist of English language arts learning outcomes. The official website (www.text2reader.com) includes additional resources, weblinks, archived content, and a readers theatre script. The materials will be copyable for distribution to students.

- **Suggested Pricing:** ¥599
- **Suggested Publication Date:** June 1, 2013

4.8. Marketing Strategy

Traditionally, education publishers have relied on their web sites, catalogues, and visits from sales reps to get their products noticed, in addition to conference appearances and selective advertising. Orca's webinars featuring panels of teachers and librarians talking about their books have also proven effective. However, given the education systems and language learning environments distinct to China, the following marketing strategies are proposed for consideration to promote Orca's ELT Reading Package in the future in that country.

The success of the package will depend upon its high-quality content and the strong support it offers teachers. Orca's series of high-interest/low-vocabulary books for beginning and struggling readers have long been recognized as among the best in North America. As well, after 10 years of development, Orca has amassed rich teaching resources that are invaluable for teachers. To achieve success in Chinese school market, the commitment and involvement of the teachers is critical because their recommendations will enhance the wide adoption of Orca's ELT Reading Package among students.

4.8.1. *The Teacher Training Program*

According to Chinese curriculum experts, teacher training in the past years has been mainly focused on theories and concepts of learning process. Going forward, the

training of language proficiency in English and practical teaching skills will be further strengthened. (Chen Li, 2012)

As the leader of foreign language teaching research and publishing both at home and abroad, FLTRP has long been concerned about the real situation of English teaching in China and has made great efforts to improve the teaching and research level of English teachers and help them solve various problems in teaching. To this end, Basic Education Publishing, with large investments worth millions of *renminbi* each year, invites domestic and foreign experts in the field of basic English education to go to different provinces where its books are used, deliver the latest educational philosophy to teachers, find out their real demands, and solve their problems. After its continuing efforts for several years, BEP has provided more than 1,200 training sessions for nearly 560,000 teachers and continues to enjoy an extremely good reputation. In recent years, FLTRP has also extended its service in the field of all expenses paid teacher training programs, meaning the expenses teachers occurred are normally paid by their schools or local governments. FLTRP has dedicated itself to building primary and secondary school English teacher professional development resources systems. So far, their teachers' development training project has established a series of special training programs, events, activities, projects, and brands such as the Xin Yu Project, the All Enclosed Spoken English, International Academic and Training Programs, and the Online Training Platform of English Teachers.

4.8.1.1 All Expenses Paid Teacher Training Program

To sell a new product well, it is a top priority to promote the new idea associated with this product. This marketing concept has been proven effective and adopted by many Chinese publishers, particularly textbook publishers because the promotion of new teaching methods is always time and energy consuming. As a result, only publishers with strong financial capabilities can afford it. This dynamic is typical of great investment and great market yield.

Once the partnership between Orca and FLTRP is established, they can work together to launch a joint all expenses paid teacher training program in July or August 2013 featuring practical teaching skills for an English reading class, which will ensure teachers understand concepts and master approaches. The target participants of the

workshop will include teachers from public and private schools as well as from large English language training institutions. As for the specific division of responsibilities, Orca Book Publishers needs to build its teacher training team, develop curriculum and training materials in the future; FLTRP will shoulder responsibilities for overall organization, including issuing notices, inviting Chinese experts, and developing logistic arrangements. The training topics will cover: the principles for picking appropriate reading materials; techniques for designing engaging reading tasks and activities; assessment method and application in daily teaching; guidance on organizing an out-of-class reading group; and instruction on writing and presenting projects. Of course, the training content can be adjusted according to the actual needs of Chinese high school teachers. If the market feedback is positive, the summer workshop will be held every year. To allow a chance for Chinese teachers to observe a real class, the workshop could also be relocated to Canada or the USA as needed. As the sales of Orca's ELT Reading Package increase in the future, the training mode could be copied and extended to reach a wider audience at the provincial level. That's to say, the training program will be held in partnership with the interested provincial department of education. Conservatively speaking, the workshop can attract 100 teachers each year. The trained teachers will help spread concepts and promote the sales of Orca's ELT Reading Package.

4.8.1.2 NSE National Symposia

Conference marketing is a cost-effective means to generate revenue because the target audience is already assembled by the organizer. As a result, most Chinese publishers have attached great importance to various conferences, making full use of these opportunities to promote products or services among classroom teachers, principals and school administrators. The commonly used forms include book display, product presentation, lectures, market research or symposia.

FLTRP also enjoys rich conferences resources. As an after-sale service, BEP holds annual New Standard English (NSE) national symposia for primary, junior, and senior levels, an NSE Cup English on-line teaching plan and courseware competition, and a regional workshop, covering about 5,000 classroom teachers across the country. Full promotional use of these symposia and competitions could be made by delivering a lecture that details the many advantages of using Hi-Lo books to develop the reading

skills of all levels of students. The examples contained in the lecture will be taken from Orca's ELT Reading Package. Selling books at symposia has proved highly effective, particularly those books mentioned by keynote speakers. Usually, the sales of books could be processed in cooperation with local bookstores, which will take charge of transporting and displaying books, collecting money, and writing receipts.

4.8.2. Direct Mail Marketing

Impacted by low discounts of online bookstores and Email frauds, direct marketing has been losing its popularity in recent years in China. In addition, many people are tired of telephone marketing and refuse to answer promotional phone calls. Despite these adverse factors, the strategy of direct mail marketing can still be considered for this project. To begin with, in the field of education, this project enjoys a clear target audience of foreign language schools, key secondary schools or large language training institutions. Next, the pricing of the package is relatively high (¥399 *renminbi*) and suitable for direct marketing. Moreover, unlike primary and junior high schools, secondary school teachers are allowed to organize their students and place group orders on the materials they find useful. Lastly, as we all know, the prerequisite for successful direct marketing is to build a mutual trust. Correspondence bearing the FLTRP official seal is seen as reliable and it is easier to convince educators that it is serious and substantial. When direct mail marketing is combined with assistance of local agents, the normal response rate can be up to 20% and even greater, thus generating considerable income.

There are many foreign language schools and large English training institutions in China that could be considered as the target of a direct mail marketing campaign for Orca's products. An attractively designed flyer and order form with FLTRP official seal would be a very effective sales tool. FLTRP has collected a considerable list of such schools and institutions. These include the "Hundred-School Project" (a nationwide alliance for well-known foreign language schools and key high schools), the "New Concept English Alliance" (a national alliance for English training institutions, including Global Education & Technology Co., Ltd, New Oriental Education & Technology Group, Beijing Juren Education Group, Shanghai Only Education Group and Jilin Daqiao Foreign Language School), and school lists collected from related academic

conferences. Direct mail marketing strategy will be employed to outreach all these schools and institutions in the future.

4.8.3. Social Media Campaign

Thanks to the Internet we live in a small world. Most adolescents today are easily engaged and comfortable with online learning programs. (Dori Veto, 2006) Using the Internet provides students with round-the-clock access to learning materials. Undeniably, social media have become an integral part of their life in the digital era. It is one of the basic tenets of effective adolescent instruction that “learning is social; adolescents learn best through interaction and activity with their peers.”(Andrew, 2012) To achieve better learning and marketing effect, a social media campaign will be launched to enhance interaction among the target audience.

At the initial marketing stage, a free blogging platform with stable services and a greatest number of users would be an optimal way for sharing teaching resources among teachers and students. Otherwise, it is quite expensive to build, maintain and promote a new website from the very start. A dedicated blog for Orca’s ELT Reading package will be created and regularly maintained on Sina, China’s most popular blogging service provider. Sina (<http://blog.sina.com.cn/>) has literally millions of users in China. The Orca blog on Sina will serve as a sharing platform for students, teachers, authors, and publishers. It will offer a collection of related articles and documents, for example, teachers’ suggestion and reflection on using Orca’s Hi-Lo fiction, students’ classroom projects (character letter, letter to author, alternate book ending, student recommendations of book, coat of arms, six word memoir, file folder book report, mobile book report, visual story), media buzz and praises, authors’ interviews, and audiovisual clips of reader theatres. At first, the documents are mainly collected from Canada and the USA. As time goes by, more documents will be produced by Chinese high school students.

To expand the marketing impact, interlinks and sharing can be established between the dedicated blog and local educational resources websites at different levels. In the past ten years, resources websites under the administration of local educational departments have played a positive role in serving the needs of classroom teachers.

Therefore, it is an effective way to reach teachers and share materials of their interest. In the future, as a partner, customized resources can be offered to these websites and the newsletter can be sent to subscribed teachers on regular basis. The print media such as popular English learning newspapers or magazines, which often enjoy millions of student readers, can also be considered as a channel to post Ads and convey marketing information.

As time goes by, richer functions can be added and more activities will be planned and implemented via the blog. For example, to help students locate their actual reading levels, the platform offers easy-to-use assessment papers. As students start using the package, an online reading log is kept automatically for recording their progress at each step, which helps students build self-confidence and motivate them to read more. To stimulate young readers, a couple of contests like a book review contest is organized and contributed articles further enrich the Sina blog dedicated to Orca's ELT Reading Package. To encourage interaction, the blog will be combined with other social media websites like <http://www.weibo.com/>, <http://www.kaixin.com/>, <http://www.renren.com/>, QQ, MSN, and Weixin as well as the official websites of FLTRP and Orca Book Publishers. It will be convenient for readers to comment, mention, follow, and forward their favorite content and spread word-of-mouth of the package. The video websites will help present the package in a vivid way. The video of classroom teaching and group discussion can be uploaded and shared on the popular video sharing websites.

5. Summary and Conclusions

English is learned in China as a foreign language in a non-native speaking environment. Consequently, reading is an efficient means for students to improve language competence. However, impacted by exam-oriented education, the teaching of English reading in Chinese secondary schools has long been beset by problems such as too much reliance on grammatical and syntactical analysis, and negligence of discourse teaching. As a result, most senior high students suffer from limited vocabulary, poor knowledge of grammar, a shortage of proper training on reading strategies and skills, and limited access to reading-level-appropriate materials. The result has been low reading interest and poor reading comprehension of students.

The release of the official edition of National English Curriculum Standards reveals an excellent market opportunity to introduce new English reading materials into the Chinese school curriculum. The design of Orca's ELT Reading Package presents an integrated solution to the teaching of English reading at the secondary school level in China. It also offers hands-on guidance for applying new NECS concepts in daily teaching at an operating level for classroom teachers, as well as supplying age-appropriate fiction at accessible reading level for secondary school students.

To ensure success in the Chinese school market, the support from high school teachers will be crucial. To be competitive, the package must offer practical and strong supports to the classroom teachers. All expenses paid teacher training programs are not only a way to popularize the concepts of teaching English-language reading in North America but also an economic growth point to generate new forms of income. Normally the expenses teachers occurred are paid by their schools or local governments. These training programs can include outreach to target audiences in foreign language schools, key secondary schools and English training institutions, as well as direct mail marketing strategies that make use of existing databases. Usually, key secondary schools are opinion leaders and benchmarks in local areas, ordinary schools will follow the examples

they set. Therefore, it is likely that this model will be copied in the public school system in the future. Eventually, the package will reach wider audiences in ordinary secondary schools across the country. And because senior high students have grown up with the Internet, social media will be employed to enhance interaction, build community, and start conversation about the Orca program.

The original resource guide contains curriculum connections with science, psychology, history, math, social studies, law, business, art, chemistry, literature, and geography/geology and is directly tied to ELA learning outcomes for BC, Ontario, and the US Common Core Standards. When introduced to the Chinese school curriculum, it is necessary to add links with National English Curriculum Standards for better use in the classroom. In addition, to lower manufacturing costs and also address the after-sales service of Go Reader, it's better to find a local manufacturer for the MP3 device.

To maintain a long-term partnership, a number of new packages have been proposed for further cooperation with FLTRP. To be specific, the product line can be extended downward and include the packages for middle schools and elementary schools; theme-based packages such as Sports Package; gender-based packages that cater to girls and boys; multi-media products such as DVD or MP3 on reader theater, project presentation, and classroom group discussion; annually revised collections of project reports, book reviews, letters to characters, and reader theater scripts; and a series of teachers' development reference books on the teaching of English reading skills.

To satisfy the needs of students to access books in multiple channels, Orca's Hi-Lo fiction could be made available in both printed and digital formats in the near future. As for group users like school libraries, classes, or educational resource websites at different levels, Orca Digital Subscription is a unique way to share ebooks school-wide. Students can access the subscription from both home and school with only the user name and password. For individual users, students can load ebooks onto ereading devices like Kobo, Nook, Hanwang, Banbook, Kindle, iPad and smartphones.

In short, Orca's ELT Reading Package will guide Chinese secondary school teachers and students back to the true nature of reading – which, at its best, is an active,

meaning-making process rather than a passive activity. By adopting Orca's Hi-Lo fiction, students will build their confidence, enjoy the pleasures of reading, and develop their reading skills as well as their problem-solving abilities in real life.

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