



Child-Centred Teaching for Children's Literature: The Case of "Miss Rumphius"

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 21 June 2025	In an increasingly challenging, complicated and changing world, the moral, citizenship, spiritual and socio-emotional development of children and youngsters has attracted unprecedented global attention not only because it affects the well-being of individuals as future citizens and exerts a profound impact on an individual's whole-person development and late adulthood but it also has a significant influence on societal (re-)construction and nation-building. Education aims to cultivate morally grounded individuals who lead lives of value, meaning, and spiritual depth. Early childhood is a critical stage of life development, and effective educational practices can enhance young children's self-awareness and help them realize their full potential. In preschools, the practice of children's literature teaching serves as a vital educational approach that combines language development, emotional growth, cultural appreciation, and the nurturing of creativity. Ultimately, the aim is to help young children recognize and fulfill their innate potential, and the well-being of individuals as future citizens. This article primarily analyzes child-centred teaching for children's literature, and using the
Corresponding Author: Yi-Huang Shih	"Miss Rumphius" as a case. It aims to provide practical guidance for teachers' teaching in children's literature, thereby enhancing the quality of early childhood education.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly challenging, complicated and changing world, the moral, citizenship, spiritual and socio-emotional development of children and youngsters has attracted unprecedented global attention not only because it affects the well-being of individuals as future citizens and exerts a profound impact on an individual's whole-person development and late adulthood but it also has a significant influence on societal (re-)construction and

nation-building. Education aims to cultivate morally grounded individuals who lead lives of value, meaning, and spiritual depth. Early childhood is a critical stage of life development, and effective educational practices can enhance young children's self-awareness and help them realize their full potential. In preschools, the practice of children's literature teaching serves as a vital educational approach that combines language development, emotional growth, cultural appreciation, and the nurturing of creativity. Ultimately, the

aim is to help young children recognize and fulfill their innate potential, and the well-being of individuals as future citizens (Lee, 2020; Shih, 2020, 2024). This article primarily analyzes children’s literature teaching in preschools, using the “Miss Rumphius” as a case. It aims to provide practical guidance for teachers’ teaching in children’s literature, thereby enhancing the quality of early childhood education.

2. CHILD-CENTERED TEACHING FOR CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

2.1 Teaching should be centered on the needs of students

Education is, by its very nature, a practical endeavor aimed at achieving “educationally worthwhile ends” (Bigge, 1982). Within the practice of education, the presence and participation of the human being consistently occupy a central position. Education is fundamentally human-being centered, a characteristic that clearly differentiates it from the behaviors of other species, which neither engage in educational discourse nor develop educational philosophies (Shih, 2020). In contrast, human beings not only construct educational ideas but also shape diverse educational systems and learning models throughout cultural evolution, seeking to achieve deeper goals such as self-understanding, value exploration, and social participation. Historical texts, such as the ancient Chinese treatise *Xue Ji* (《學記》), reveal that reflections and discourses on education have been deeply embedded in human civilization since early antiquity, highlighting the foundational role of education in both societal continuity and individual development. Within this human-centered framework, teachers and students are not merely transmitters and receivers of knowledge, but interactive agents within the educational process. Teaching, therefore, should not be understood as the mere transmission of knowledge, but rather as a dialogical and interpretive practice grounded in emotional connection, shared experience, and the co-construction of values (Chien, 2013; Christine et al, 2019). Accordingly, teaching should be centered on the needs of students. This includes not only cognitive understanding of subject matter but also attention to students’ emotional development, ethical awareness, social relationships, and self-identity. Education

must strive to understand students’ conditions within specific cultural, social, and historical contexts, and design meaningful and relevant learning experiences grounded in their lived realities. Such an approach not only reflects the core principles of student-centered education but also aligns with the modern educational aim of holistic human development. Furthermore, respecting students’ subjectivity requires teachers to adopt an open and reflective pedagogical stance—one that encourages questioning, expression of individual perspectives, and the co-construction of knowledge and meaning through dialogue. Only through such an approach can education truly serve as a process that fosters human growth, freedom, and emancipation, rather than functioning as a unidirectional transmission of knowledge.

2.2 Children’s literature instruction emphasizes grounding pedagogy in young learners’ lived experiences and interests.

Children’s literature instruction emphasizes grounding pedagogy in young learners’ lived experiences and interests. Developmentally appropriate literary selections—such as fairy tales, picture books, nursery rhymes, and folk tales—serve to foster children’s cognitive and emotional engagement (Shih, 2024). From a developmental psychology perspective, Piaget (1952) posited that preschool-aged children operate within the preoperational stage, marked by egocentric and concrete thinking. In this stage, the integration of vivid imagery and narrative storytelling helps children grasp abstract ideas and foundational interpersonal dynamics (Berk, 2013). Complementarily, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), underscoring the significance of adult mediation and peer collaboration in advancing linguistic and cognitive growth. Within this framework, children’s literature functions as a mediational tool that scaffolds learning and facilitates language internalization (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Moreover, Bruner (1986) emphasized that narrative is a primary mode through which individuals construct meaning and self-identity. Through story engagement, children not only cultivate self-concept but also begin to internalize cultural values and societal norms. In practice, picture books that reflect

children's immediate sociocultural environment—such as those portraying traditional markets, family relationships, or local festivals—help bridge textual content with real-life contexts. In Taiwanese early childhood settings, localized storybooks can significantly enhance children’s emotional expression, story comprehension, and peer interactions. Educators also report that children are more motivated to engage in storytelling, role-playing, and personal narrative construction when they encounter stories that resonate with their lived experiences. In conclusion, children’s literature serves not only as a foundation for language acquisition but also as a critical pedagogical space where developmental psychology theories, sociocultural perspectives, and cultural education converge. Its ability to support holistic development—cognitive, emotional, and social—underscores its enduring significance in early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2024b).

3. MISS RUMPHIUS FOR CHILDREN’S LITERATURE TEACHING

3.1 *Miss Rumphius*

When I first read the wonderful children's book, *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney, back in the 1980's, I was enthralled with the story of the librarian, Alice Rumphius, who lives an exciting life: seeing the world, living by the sea and figuring out her way to make the world more beautiful (Gay Cioffi, 2025). The picture book *Miss Rumphius*, written and illustrated by Barbara Cooney, narrates the story of a young girl named Alice who lives with her grandfather in a port town in the United States. Inspired by her grandfather’s life and character, Alice aspires to become like him when she grows up. Her grandfather, an artist by profession, had traveled extensively around the world before settling in a seaside house, where he ran a shop filled with Native American carvings and landscape paintings from various regions. Occasionally, Alice would assist him by painting small details, such as white clouds. Through these experiences, her dreams gradually take shape—she envisions herself, like her grandfather, journeying to faraway places and eventually residing in a house by the sea (Cooney, 1985). What is our

responsibility in the world? To Alice Rumphius, her responsibility was to do something to make the world more beautiful. But what does that mean to her and what does it mean to you? Making the world a more beautiful place may seem like a big task, but small simple gestures may have a bigger impact than you imagine. This book inspires the reader to think of small ways to do something for the common good. What will you do to make the world more beautiful (Learning to love, 2025)?

3.2 The Application of *Miss Rumphius* in Early Childhood Literature Education

This paper explores the application of *Miss Rumphius* in early childhood literature education through four key dimensions.

3.2.1 *Thematic Inquiry and Values Education*

Early childhood is a period of rapid development and growth, and regardless of physical, psychological, and social abilities, young children at this stage have great plasticity and strong imitation ability. Childhood is a critical period for individual learning; so preschool teachers must provide young children with appropriate values education at this time. This was the advice given to the main character, Alice, by her very wise grandfather. Alice was just a little girl with big dreams, but she took his advice to heart and made it the third goal she hoped to achieve in her lifetime. But she wasn’t sure exactly how she would do that. The meaning conveyed by the picture book: "Make the World More Beautiful." Extended discussion: this theme can be further explored by discussing how to put this idea into practice in daily life—for example: helping classmates, caring for the environment, and sharing happiness. It aims to inspire young children to reflect on how they can contribute to the world, while nurturing a sense of responsibility and empathy. For example, Shih’s research on intergenerational learning between older adults and young children underscores the critical role of love and care in fostering the holistic physical and psychological development of young children (Mitchell, 2015, Shih, 2021, 2024a, 2024c).

3.2.2 *Development of Language and Expressive Abilities*

Young children have strong learning abilities because of

their high neural plasticity and ability to imitate, and they are driven by curiosity. Preschool teachers providing developmentally appropriate learning environments, equipment, and activities for young children can positively affect their language development. The development of oral expression and narrative competence plays a crucial role in fostering young children's cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional growth. To promote the development of children's oral expression and narrative competence, instructional strategies encourage learners to describe the visual elements, character emotions, and chronological sequences depicted in the picture book. A recommended pedagogical activity involves a *storytelling relay*, wherein children collaboratively extend the narrative of *Miss Rumphius* by envisioning and elaborating on subsequent adventures. This activity not only facilitates the acquisition of sequencing and imaginative thinking skills but also supports the refinement of verbal storytelling proficiency (Ministry of Education, 2017; Shao & Shih, 2024).

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